Academy Rewards

Vocational ed retools for a changing economy. Page 40

MARCH 2007

neatoday

NEW MONEY MOVES

Pay, pensions, health care—life's financial games are getting tougher. Check out ways to win.

SEE PAGE 24

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> VOLUME 25 > NUMBER 6 > 2007

features

COVER 24

NEW MONEY MOVES

Some days, it feels like you keep rolling the dice and losing a turn. But there are ways to succeed at the money game! Learn the winning strategies of your colleagues as they ask for (and get) higher pay and fight to protect their health care and retirement benefits.

FIELD TRIPS

Over the River and Through the Woods 30

Is the field trip dead? Despite mounting money issues and testing pressure, teachers are finding ways to get out of the classroom.

LIBRARY TALE

Room for Readers 35

Sadly, this isn't fiction: Just when schools need librarians more than ever, they're losing them (and often their valuable collections). But they're also finding new ways to connect with students.

CLASSROOM TECH

Podcasting the 1600s 38

You don't have to be a Thomas Edison to figure out this newfangled broadcast technology. Tune in to the latest teaching tool that helps bring learning to life.

WHERE WE TEACH

Academy Rewards 40

As the "Dynamo of Dixie" makes an economic comeback, its schools follow suit, with vocational ed leading the way.

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ESP

Parents Take the Wheel 22

More and more, the kids on the bus belong to the driver, as working parents take them along for the ride to school.

DRUG USE

Steroids 101 23

With steroid use among high school students doubling since the early 1990s, educators need to know how to detect and discourage the use of these drugs.

STUDENT ACTIVISM

Minimally Adequate? 33

A judge said these rural schools meet the standard—but student photos say no way.

SPOTLIGHT

What Teachers Want 44

When North Carolina teachers answer their Teacher Working Conditions survey, they get results.

BULLETIN BOARD

Homework Tips 46

Learn the secrets to getting homework turned in, and check out how a music teacher hooks students on The Beatles.

MONEY

The Tax Man 48

We've got tips to keep the tax man happy. Also, travel insurance: Is it worth it?

departments

5 **Editor's Note**
7 **President's Viewpoint**
8 **TalkBack**
11 **UpFront** Can Title IX force shoe companies to donate to girls' athletics?
18 **Leading the Way**
20 **State Report**
50 **People**
51 **Debate** Should we abolish homework?
53 **Resources**
64 **Last Bell**

57 **EDUCATION MARKET**
63 **MARKETPLACE**

ON THE WEB

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Learn how to start podcasting with students.

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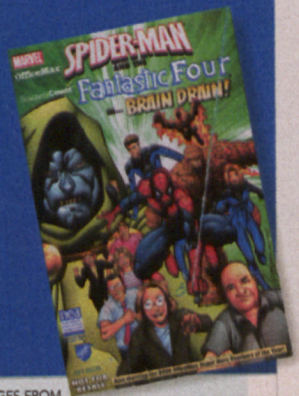

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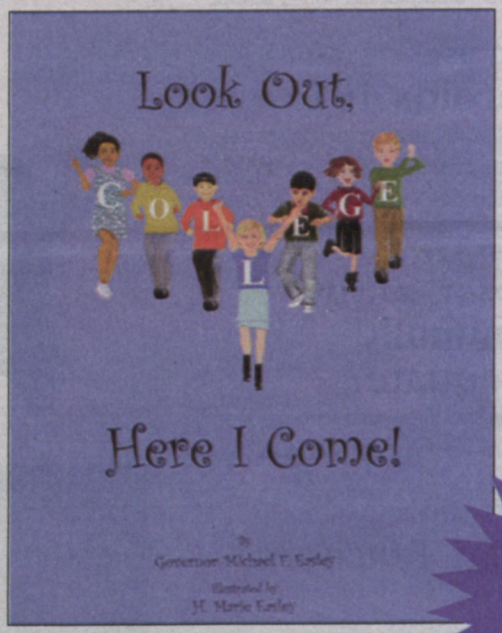

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Reg Weaver, NEA President

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Get in the Game

Remember the game of Life? You'd start with a little plastic car, and as you made your way along the gameboard, accumulate pink and blue pegs and piles of pastel-colored cash. If you were lucky, you'd wind up retired in Millionaire Estates; even if you weren't, there was always Countryside Acres. ¶ Of course, that's not the way life really works. Ask West Virginia teacher Sandy Gay, who stands to lose more than $1,000 a month when she retires because of an ill-advised change to her state's pension system. Or Texas secretary Rae Nwosu, who can't afford health insurance and is still paying for a nearly four-year-old emergency room visit. ¶ But they and other educators across the country are fighting to preserve their benefits and win professional pay—a starting salary of at least $40,000 for teachers and a living wage for education support professionals. ¶ Pennsylvania teacher Sherry Dellaposta stood firm during a draining contract impasse. Kentucky bus driver John Boggs went to school board members and the public to share just how little his co-workers made. You'll hear their stories and others, starting on page 24. They made a difference, and so can you.

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DEMOCRACY. We believe public education is the cornerstone of our republic. Public education provides individuals with the skills to be involved, informed, and engaged in our representative democracy.

PROFESSIONALISM. We believe that the expertise and judgment of education professionals are critical to student success. We maintain the highest professional standards, and we expect the status, compensation, and respect due all professionals.

PARTNERSHIP. We believe partnerships with parents, families, communities, and other stakeholders are essential to quality public education and student success.

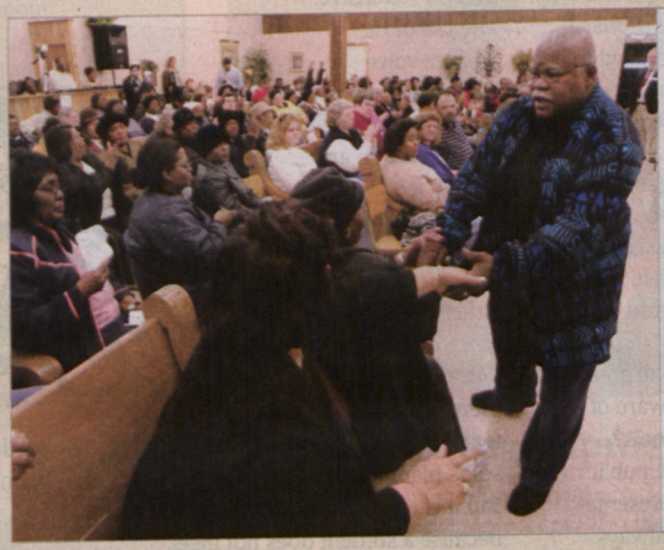
COLLECTIVE ACTION. We believe individuals are strengthened when they work together for the common good. As education professionals, we improve both our professional status and the quality of public education when we unite and advocate collectively.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

That's What Professional Pay Means to Me!

At 6 a.m., Jerry Parham is at the top of his game as he begins his day as a transportation specialist for the Sussex County Public Schools in Virginia. At 8:15, he starts his second job as a teacher's aide in biology and earth science classes. When the school bell rings, he returns to his bus-driving duties. And when that concludes, he starts his second shift—working as a mentor for local teens and serving as assistant pastor at Morningstar Baptist Church.

Jerry doesn't do all of this because he likes to stay busy. Even after 10 years as a bus driver and eight years as an instructional aide, the Virginia Education Association's 2006 Education Support Professional (ESP) of the Year still makes only $26,755, which is nearly $10,000 less than Sussex County's annual median income. It might be hard to believe, but Jerry is actually better off than some of his colleagues—one bus driver has worked for the county for 47 years and earns $13,000.



"No one who dedicates a life to driving, nourishing, counseling, or teaching our nation's students should be forced to live at or below the poverty line."

—REG WEAVER

No one who dedicates a life to driving, nourishing, counseling, or teaching our nation's students should be forced to live at or below the poverty line. But all too often, teachers and ESPs who choose a life of public service must trade away their right to a decent standard of living.

NEA is fighting to change that with a nationwide salary campaign to win a $40,000 starting salary for all teachers, an appropriate living wage for all education support professionals, and appropriate professional pay for higher education faculty and staff.

As the national voice for public school employees, we know that too many teachers and ESPs have been denied professional pay for too long. Working in public schools is not an act of charity—and educators should not have to sacrifice their families' needs when they choose a career in public education.

Team NEA, we are using our bully pulpit to help move this agenda. Now it's your turn. This fight can only be won at the grassroots level where voters speak and elected officials listen. Professional pay is possible when communities make quality employees a priority.

The Ithaca Paraprofessionals Association of New York won a 50 percent wage increase over three years by talking publicly about their members' commitment and poverty wages. The New Jersey Education Association has bargained multi-year contracts with teacher minimums of $40,000 or more in a majority of the state's school districts. And NEA members have written their own similar success stories in Alabama, Montana, and Vermont.

The key to each of these campaigns' success was member involvement. We each have the responsibility to draw attention to the plight of educators forced to work for subpar wages. Without strong membership, we have no voice. And without a voice, we lack the power to gain professional salaries for teachers who lead America's public school classrooms and education support professionals who make our schools work.

It's not child's play to get a roomful of children to pay attention, let alone learn. And it's no easy task to nurse ill youngsters back to health, prepare nutritious meals for students, and safely transport students to and from school.

Great educators form the backbone of great public schools. It's time to pay them what they're worth. Only elephants should work for peanuts.

Reg Weaver

NEA PRESIDENT REG WEAVER

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The Middle Ground

"Advancing the Middle Ground" (February) verified what I have believed about middle school for several years—high academic standards and a challenging curriculum can coexist successfully with the chaos and emotional upheavals of adolescence. Planning and working for the future does not need to be equated with robbing young people of the innocent fun of childhood, and might possibly direct them away from the not-so-innocent fun that some of them choose.

PAM SEBELIEN
Richland, Washington

I am pleased to see that there is once again a concerted effort to reintroduce high academic standards into middle school.

I have been teaching since 1965, both in middle and high schools, and I am hoping that programs like the ones you write about will bring me students who are prepared for high school work and work habits.

BARRY BLEY
Arvada, Colorado

NCLB, TAKE TWO

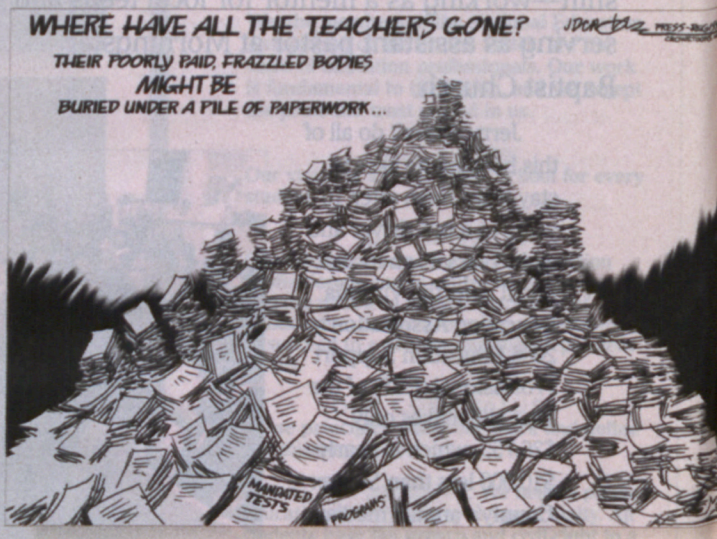
Every story in "NCLB: The Sequel" (February) touched on an experience or feeling I have experienced. I teach at a Reading First school, and the primary grade teachers are closely watched to be sure we are reading the script and using only sanctioned materials. I fear that elementary students will look back on their elementary years and blame the teachers for the sterile, uncreative, and oppressive atmosphere that exists today.

ANNE KRIEGER
Nelson County, Virginia

Why aren't we making more of an effort to make the general public aware of what's happening to our schools? Wouldn't we fare better if the public applied pressure on their representatives? As a teacher who has always worked with at-risk children, I find the title "No Child Left Behind" offensive. The use of the passive voice carries a certain implication.

If children are failing, it is because they have been left behind, that is, through either incompetence or lack of will. Certainly there are some teachers and schools that may deserve some blame for their failing students. But it is incorrect to assume that because a student does not meet particular standards, then someone is to blame.

FRAN FERRARA
Bridgeton, New Jersey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PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Teacher accountability! Student accountability! Well, do the parents have a responsibility? It is totally unacceptable for a child to come to school unprepared, whether the issue is lunch money, homework, school supplies, or basic everyday skills. Sure, we spend more time with the students than anyone, but we cannot do it alone!

JUMP HIGHER FOR LESS

While schools continue to pay such low salaries, they also raise the bar for certification. Why would any young person go to that much trouble to become a teacher and for the low salary offered? I have as much education as my cousin the doctor. But I make about one-fourth of her salary. What is wrong with this picture?

—FROM THE NEA.ORG DISCUSSION BOARDS

WANT TO WEIGH IN?
Chat with your colleagues on NEA's discussion boards at **www.nea.org/voices**.

FROM THE DEAN'S OFFICE

I have just completed 10 years of teaching and have this year moved into a dean of students position ("The Discipline Dean," February). At times the referrals that come into my office are sketchy and seem to have been written more out of frustration than a need for "hard-core" discipline. I am hoping that many of my colleagues read "Tips from a 'Discipline Dean,'" as they are vital in addressing those students who have a tendency toward disruptive behavior. I will be keeping a copy of this article in my desk until the day I retire.

KRISTOPHER KAUFMAN
Nelson, Pennsylvania

SMALL SCHOOLS

I would like to voice my displeasure on the article about the Lima High School transition to small schools (February). The article was very slanted, biased, and incomplete. There were over 10 teachers interviewed for this article, yet only three quoted. One small school was basically ignored. The article did not scratch the surface to accurately report all that is going on—past and present. Our teaching staff is very upset over the article. Bottom line—if you are going to do a story, do a thorough story.

LORI RUSCHAU-WILL
Lima, Ohio

SHOULD HE COMPETE?

How dismaying that your question about the teenager on the January cover is "Can He Compete?" There are all sorts of questions that might have been asked about him: Can he think critically? Is he curious? Does he care about others? The article suggests that our students aren't doing as badly as some would have us believe, and also that we shouldn't be overly focused on test scores. These are important messages. But to privilege competitiveness over other goals—indeed, to take its value for granted—implies that we want children in other countries to do poorly, a position that's morally and intellectually indefensible. My question about this boy is: Can he help us to understand that success doesn't have to be at someone else's expense?

ALFIE KOHN
Belmont, Massachusetts

CORRECTION

South Carolina was incorrectly identified on a map in the February 2007 issue.

LET'S TALK

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Letters are edited for length and clarity.

NEA Today (ISSN 0734-7219) is published eight times a year, monthly, in September, October, November, January, February, March, April, and May by the National Education Association, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036-3290.

Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *NEA Today*, Attn: NEA Financial & Membership Services Address Change, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Telephone: (202) 822-7065.

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upfront

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Playing for Keeps

After a decisive win at the state basketball championship in South Carolina last year, followed by tip-top billing from the South Carolina Basketball Coaches Association this year, you might think the girls team from Lower Richland High School is the kind that some big shoe company would want to drop their swooshes or stripes on.

Not so.

"You're on your own," says coach Deborah Stroman, a 22-year veteran at Lower Richland. Even as the boys at her school have won big endorsements (and big titles, too), her girls have made do with scant resources.

With few exceptions, it's hard for girl athletes to catch free equipment from big corporate sponsors. About three-quarters of sponsorships go to boys' teams, according to industry watchdogs, with the aim of building brand loyalty—eventually that 6'2" pimple-faced forward could become a 7'2" all-star in the NBA, willing to sign an endorsement contract and sell millions of shoes.

But at schools where the boys net the free shots and girls don't, administrators may be violating 1972 Title IX regulations banning gender discrimination in school athletics, say women's sports activists. Under the law, schools have an obligation to provide "equal benefits," according to one New York law professor. And this isn't the company's problem to solve—they have no Title IX obligations.

At Lower Richland, Stroman hopes there might be a corporate name in her future. With a couple of big shots on her team, including her own 6'3" daughter, she believes her players will continue to garner national attention. "I really do believe the girls are closing the gap," she says. "You can tell when you're in the gym, playing for the championship—it's packed. Back when I was a player, it was just my Mom up there."

In the meantime, advocates say there might be another solution to the unequal endorsements: Just ask. Although coaches of boys' sports may be reluctant to bite the hand that feeds them, activists say that companies might be happy to add the girls to their roster—if they're simply asked to play fair.

12 WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACROSS THE WORLD

13 A FUZZY INTRUDER

15 KINDERMAIL

PHOTO TOP: RON LEVINE

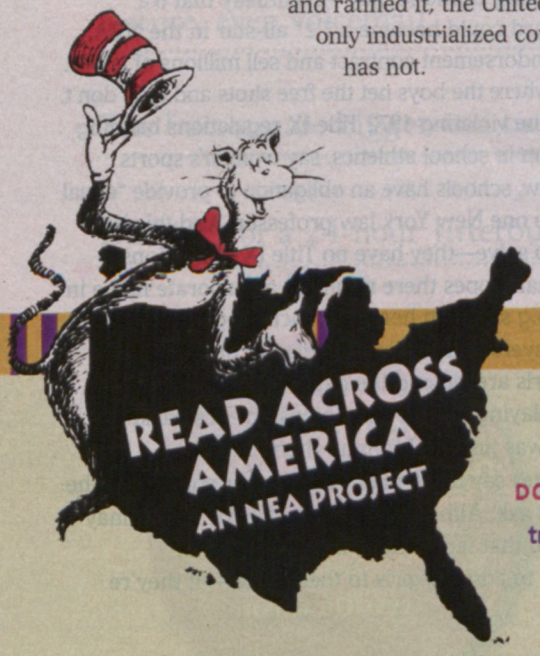
Where the Girls Are Not

WHEN THE 51ST United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meets this month, an NEA-supported teacher will be there, helping to promote women's rights across the world. For years, through its partners at Education International, a federation of global education unions, NEA has sponsored the attendance of a teacher from the developing world. This year, it's Joan Hippolyte, vice-president of the St. Lucia Teachers' Union in the Caribbean.

In 2007, as the CSW focuses on "the girl child" and the discrimination and violence that she too often faces, the discussion will be more important than ever. Around the world, just 61 percent of girls make it to high school, according to UNESCO. Discrimination is the chief culprit, but part of the problem, in all developing nations, is a lack of qualified teachers—especially women.

Consider Afghanistan. Despite a 500 percent increase in enrollment over the past six years, half of its children still don't go to school, according to a new Oxfam report—and, of the current students, only about one-third are girls. The country has about 140,000 teachers now (and needs 50,000 more), but just 17 percent are high school graduates themselves. Only 28 percent are women.

NEA takes seriously the cause of gender equality and has called on the U.S. government to ratify the international treaty for the rights of women (CEDAW). Although more than 90 percent of the U.N. members have signed and ratified it, the United States is the only industrialized country that has not.



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READING ROADS

ON BOARD WITH READING!

DO YOU KNOW the Magic School Bus, the one that transports its students through space and time to learn new things? Well, some Oregon school buses will be doing much the same on March 2, NEA's Read Across America Day, when drivers stop in their tracks to introduce their young passengers to the wonderful world of reading. "We want to show students that we definitely are a team with teachers and we take reading seriously too!" says Janis Eggert, a Lebanon driver and NEA Board member. For more information about Read Across, including a tip on what to do at 2:36 that afternoon, go to www.nea.org/readacross.

WOMAN PHOTO: CORBIS

A growing problem

When Milton Elementary teachers returned from summer vacation this year, they found an unwelcome intruder in their classrooms—climbing the walls, hiding above ceiling tiles, and eating through wood panels. It was mold. White, black, fuzzy, sometimes even orange.

"WE CALLED IT 'Black Friday,' because we had 15 minutes to run into school and grab anything personal," says librarian Karen Vallancourt, Milton Education and Support Association (MESA) president. After a wet summer and years of deferred maintenance (instead of fixing leaks, the district painted moldy ceiling tiles), the air quality had sunk to hazardous levels in the Vermont school. Within days, workers in what Vallancourt calls "Stay Puft Marshmallow suits" were on the scene.

Since then, the cleanup has grown to a $3.5 million-plus renovation, requiring a hike in property taxes. Although some classrooms were fixed by December, allowing teachers to return from temporary shelters in churches and factories, the work won't be finished until August. In the meantime, Vermont-NEA responded with a generous equipment drive, and MESA continues to accept cash donations to help teachers replace materials. (For more information, e-mail David Boulanger at dboulanger@vtnea.org.)

Vallancourt urges her colleagues to check their own schools. "Look around your schools and make sure this doesn't happen," she says. "What's under those ceiling tiles?"

$39

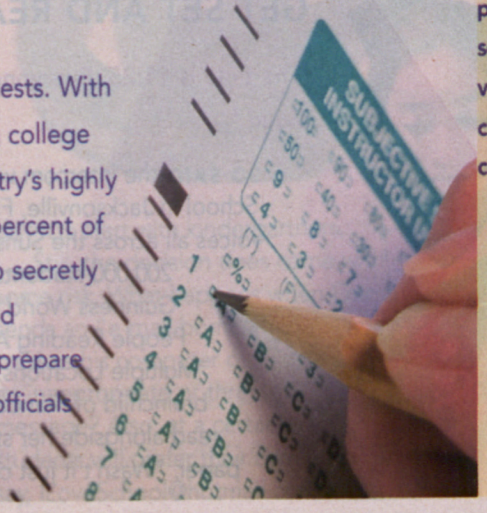
The average amount of **MONEY** spent by **ELEMENTARY** teachers on classroom materials and supplies.

SOURCE: QUALITY EDUCATION DATA INC.

EXAMS VS CLASSES

A TEST-CRAZY COUNTRY

We're not the only ones going nuts over tests. With Japanese students stressing over grueling college entrance exams—a hallmark of their country's highly standardized school system—at least 10 percent of high school principals decided this year to secretly drop required courses, typically history and geography, to give students more time to prepare for the tests. But now, Education Ministry officials say, more than 80,000 high school seniors don't have the right credits to graduate.



Notepad

Islands for Everybody

Here's the supposed "problem" with public schools, according to a new study from the pro-voucher Cato Institute. They require different kinds of people to go to school together, forcing them into conflict! Discounting the possibility that people of different faiths and cultures might learn from each other, the study suggests fights can't be avoided when you force students to go to school with those with "different values"—among them religious beliefs and the teaching of evolution. The analysis, called "Why We Fight: How Public Schools Cause Social Conflict," also points to textbooks that show different races and cultures as another unavoidable instigator.

On the Other Hand...

Public schools actually have played a vital role in America's democratic society—especially as they have unified diverse populations—and their mission remains important today, according to a new report from the Center on Education Policy. That report, called "Why We Still Need Public Schools: Public Education for the Common Good," points to six core missions of public schools—including their role in providing equal opportunities for all children. To read more, go to www.cep-dc.org/PublicSchoolFacts/why.

Have a great idea?

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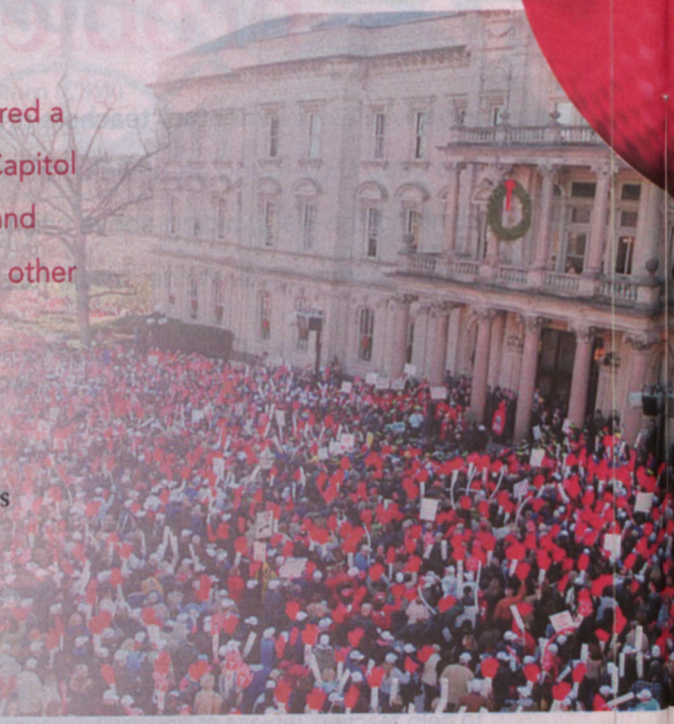
SCANTRON PHOTO: JASON STITT

Back Off, Trenton!

By the thousands, New Jersey educators personally delivered a message to state lawmakers: Back Off! Their rally on the Capitol steps late last year, protesting changes to state pensions and health benefits, included a whopping 14,000 teachers and other public employees—and almost all of them angry.



"I'M ON THE STEPS of one of the richest states in the nation, in one of the best educational systems, and you get no respect!" shouted NEA Executive Board Member Mike Billirakis.

Weeks earlier, a special legislative committee had proposed 41 changes to state benefits, including boosting retirement from age 55 to 62 for new teachers, capping pensions (even though the average is just $29,000), and requiring all public employees to pay more for health care benefits.

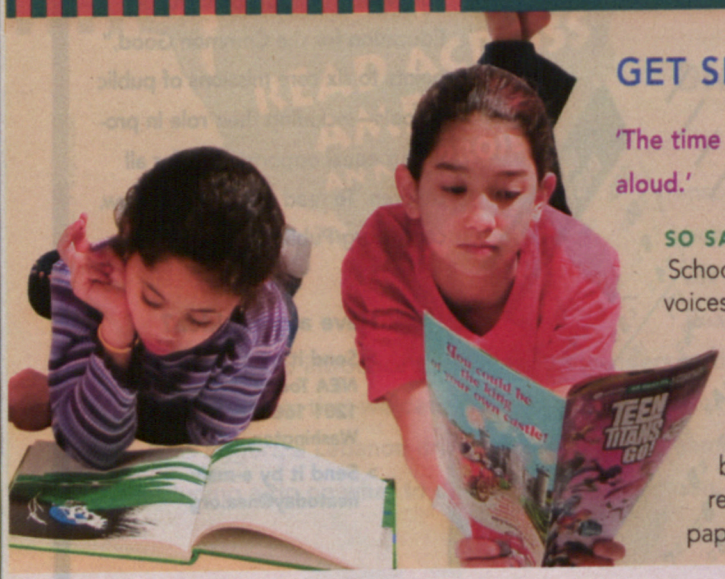
"This is a middle-class movement to defend good jobs," said Jonathan Freitag, a 29-year-old social studies teacher from Mount Holly.

While the committee said its intent is to save money, the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) says the new plan would have another catastrophic effect: One in every four New Jersey teachers would quickly retire to protect their benefits. (Currently, more than 32,000 are eligible—a stunning 23.3 percent.) And, as NJEA points out, the changes don't make these jobs very attractive.

By January, their arguments had been heard. The pension bill had shrunk from 131 pages to 64. Among the pages that had been removed? The boost in retirement age. Also, apart from the pension issue, a tax-saving idea to consolidate school districts had died. "It just shows the NJEA is still powerful," state Sen. Bob Smith, the bill's sponsor, told a local paper.

$39

RECORD READERS

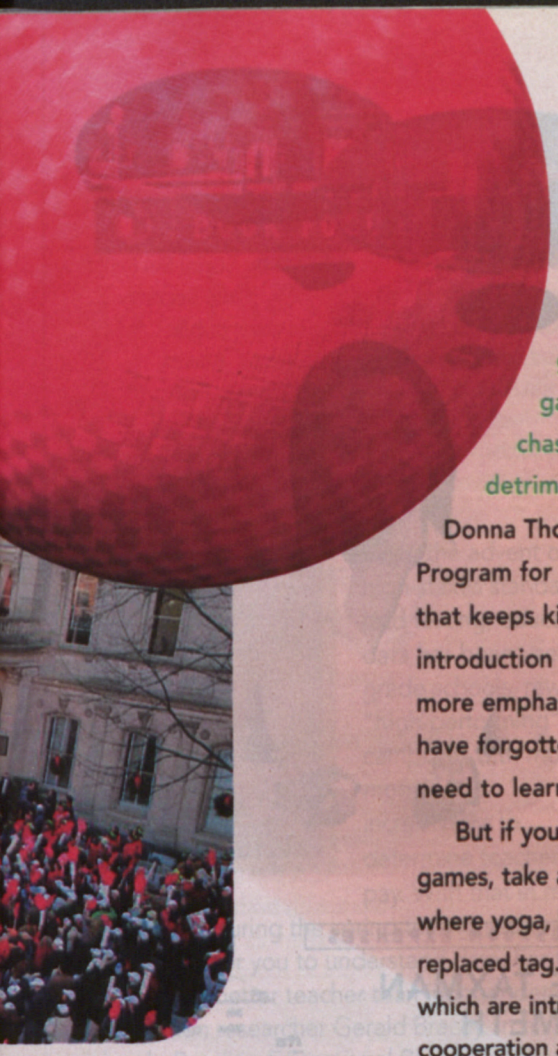


GET SET AND READ!

'The time is 11:25. Everyone should begin reading aloud.'

SO SAID the intercom voice at Mandarin Middle School in Jacksonville, Florida, and so said similar voices all across the Sunshine State, as more than 200,000 students attempted to set a new Guinness World Record last year for "Most People Reading Aloud Simultaneously in Multiple Locations." The event was the brainchild of Mandarin teacher Jane Feber, who read alongside her students and told her local paper, "Wasn't it just cool being here?"

RALLY PHOTO: NJEA; READERS PHOTO: DANNY PECK



You're Out!

This spring, as children run outside for recess and physical education, many traditional games will be called foul. In recent months, games like tag and touch football have been chased off playgrounds and called dangerous and detrimental to emotional and physical health.

Donna Thompson, executive director of the National Program for Playground Safety, doesn't think any game that keeps kids moving should be tagged out. "With the introduction of No Child Left Behind, people have put more emphasis on the intellectual part of learning and have forgotten about the physical part," she says. "Kids need to learn how to play nice."

But if your district already has blown its whistle on certain games, take a peek at the playbook in Fort Worth, Texas, where yoga, ballroom dancing, and rock climbing have replaced tag. Program directors there say the activities, which are introduced in fourth and fifth grade, encourage cooperation and provide children with a better understanding of lifelong health and fitness.

—LISA RASSENTI

3

The average amount of **MONEY** spent by **MIDDLE SCHOOL** teachers on classroom materials and supplies.

SOURCE: QUALITY EDUCATION DATA INC.

You've Got Mail!

To: Emma Grace
From: Jake
Re: Recess?

EVEN SOME KINDERGARTNERS now have e-mail accounts, as more educators across the country believe the future demands a techno-fluency that starts with "send and receive" at an early age.

In Suffield, Connecticut, a $20,000 system allows first-graders to send messages, e-mail work assignments, and chat on online discussion boards. Other districts start with kindergartners.

Still, the decision does come with some risk. What happens when Emma sends an "e-mail bomb" to Jake and crashes his computer or—more likely—an inappropriate or threatening message? Also, at a certain age, students will prefer their own accounts—say, ILoveSchool@hotmail.com? LOL.

Capitol Report

A Good Start

The 110th Congress opened in January with several House of Representatives victories, including a minimum wage hike, a new step to making health care more affordable, and cuts to student loan interest rates—all legislation that NEA actively worked for.

The minimum wage hike would raise hourly wages from $5.15 to $7.25, making it a little easier for low-income families to manage the increasing costs of health care and childcare. The initiative, like the others passed by the House, needs Senate approval.

Likewise, the House passed a bill requiring the federal government to negotiate drug prices for Medicare recipients. Current law forbids negotiating with pharmaceutical companies—even as senior citizens, many of them retired educators, are forced to forgo necessities to pay for their prescriptions.

The House also passed a measure that would cut federal student loan rates in half.

NEA has additional priorities for Congress this year, including the reauthorization of ESEA/NCLB and education funding. To learn more—and also to send messages to your senators about the loan rates and other House actions—go to NEA's Legislative Action Center at www.nea.org/lac.

Have a great idea?

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BALL PHOTO: SUZANNE TUCKER; GIRL PHOTO: STOCKBYTE

Where the Newest Teachers Are

FIRST 5 YEARS

GIVE AN EXPERIENCED teacher a choice of assignments and they'll usually pick the "easy" school, right? (The one in the suburbs with the helpful parents and high-achieving students.) Left behind, in the poor urban school, are their newest colleagues—or so the thinking goes.

Well, not so fast. A new report from NEA's partners at the American Federation of Teachers shows just the opposite. Teachers with collective bargaining agreements are actually less likely to transfer than their colleagues without agreements, the study found. For example, in 2000, 8.4 percent with bargaining rights transferred, compared with 13 percent without.

Researchers also found that the percentage of new teachers in poor schools is actually a little smaller than the percentage in wealthier schools (4 percent and 5 percent, respectively.)

VITAL STATS

More than a **third of teachers** said MySpace and other social networking **Web sites have disrupted** their school's learning environment, according to a recent National School Boards Association survey.

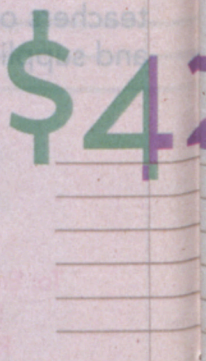
Here's why:

SOURCE: NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

CLASSROOM EXPENSES

THE TAXMAN COMETH

THE NEW READING RUG and the set of Eric Carle favorites set you back at least $100. And the extra pencils for the kids who always forget? Here's some good news—in the final days of the 109th Congress, with pressure from NEA and leadership from Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and John Warner (R-VA), legislators extended the $250 above-the-line tax deduction for out-of-pocket classroom expenses. It's not enough—NEA will work to increase the deduction this year—but it'll help a little. Go to NEA's Legislative Action Center (www.nea.org/lac/edtax) and urge your member of Congress to cosponsor H.R. 549, which would increase the deduction to $400 and make it permanent.

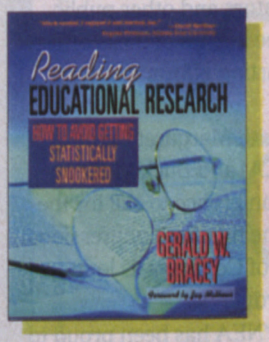


"In a management class I took, hell was defined as being
wonder why teachers leave the profession? Performance

CITY SKYLINE: KEVIN TAVARES; PHOTO OF HOMES: AMY MYERS; TEACHER PHOTO: DIGITAL VISION; VITAL STATS IMAGES: TAD DENSON, KARL ROSENCRANTS, STEPHEN COBURN; TAX FORMS: SAMUEL KESSLER

BOOK FOCUS

You and Testing: A Causal Relationship?



Since the advent of high-stakes standardized testing, education data has been used to grade schools, reward "high-performing" campuses with more money, and increasingly, to determine teacher pay. With that in mind, especially during the spring testing season, it's important for you to understand data. For that, there's no better teacher than independent education researcher Gerald Bracey. In his new book, *Reading Educational Research: How to Avoid Getting Statistically Snookered* (Heinemann), Bracey provides easy-to-understand lessons on such concepts as correlation, and also asks readers to consider the many ways that data can be abused. These days, reading the numbers means calling the shots—so make sure it's you doing it.

27

The average amount of **MONEY** spent by **HIGH SCHOOL** teachers on classroom materials and supplies.

SOURCE: QUALITY EDUCATION DATA INC.

Q&A

QUESTIONS FOR Marian Wright Edelman

CHILD ADVOCATE

The Children's Defense Fund's slogan is "Leave No Child Behind." Sound familiar? They had it first. *NEA Today* talked recently with CDF leader Marian Wright Edelman.

How did you feel when the Administration used your motto?

Edelman: Not good. It's our trademark. We thought about suing, [but] that would be expensive, so we just decided to talk to people about the fact that this was a nice slogan but they were not honoring it, and in fact it was a smoke screen for policies that left millions of children behind. We had introduced our own bill [in 2003], the Act to Leave No Child Behind, and after No Child Left Behind got in, a lot of folks called up and said, "How could you do this?" And we kept trying to say, "This isn't our bill."

Are there parts of NCLB that you like?

Edelman: We applaud disaggregating data for sub-groups of children, so we can see who is learning and who is not. But then the question is, are the resources there to do something about it? And we've been concerned that people are teaching to the test. Children are far more than their tests. The overreliance on testing is stifling creativity.

What was in your own Act to Leave No Child Behind?

Edelman: It would ensure health care for all children; reform child welfare systems to keep children in their families; end child poverty; and provide increased resources for schools. Children don't come in pieces, they come in families, and families live in communities. You have to address all the things that impact them. It would cost less than the repeal of the estate tax.

What happened to it?

Edelman: Five or six [parts] did pass, including a child tax credit, which lifted 500,000 children from poverty. And we're going to go back now. I think of it as renovating our whole national house, room by room. The room we're trying to renovate this year is the health room. We have 9 million uninsured children, 90 percent of them in working families. Our new bill [would] cover all uninsured children. The cost would be $14.8 billion. A bargain. It's not even a comma in terms of what we're spending in Iraq.

CDF is allied with NEA and 100 other organizations in seeking changes to ESEA/NCLB. Read more at **www.nea.org/ref?3249**.

responsible for output with little or no control over input. Do we pay will be their little hell."

—From a letter to the editor, **Des Moines Register,** November 20, 2006 (Allan F. Demorest)

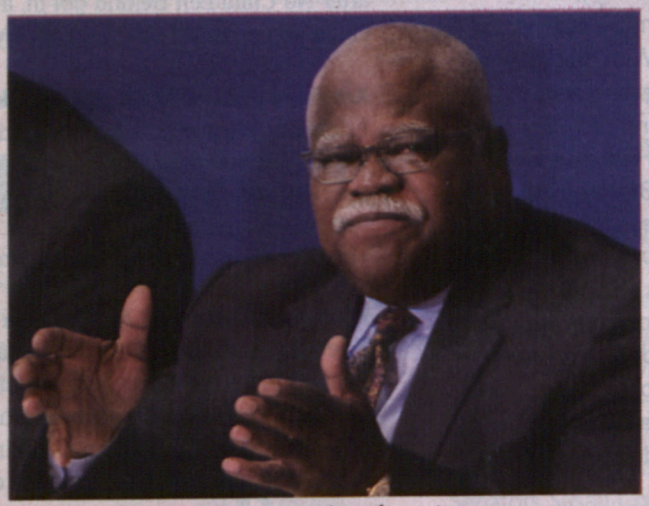
Offsetting Priorities

NEA rallies to eliminate a longstanding practice that robs countless educators of full retirement benefits.

When Margaret Cagle left the private sector in 1993 to become a math teacher at Lawrence Middle School in Los Angeles, she was aware of the financial sacrifice she was about to make.

"It was not an easy decision," Cagle, a former architect, recalls. "But our schools desperately need to recruit professionals like me to teach math and science to fill a shortage of teachers," she says.

What she didn't expect, however, was that her change in careers could cause her additional hardship when she retires. Because of two arcane provisions in Social Security law called the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO), Cagle, a 2006 recipient of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science, could find her pensions penalized for devoting herself to teaching. Like her, millions of public sector employees across the country stand to lose a significant portion of their Social Security benefits earned in previous careers.



NEA President **Reg Weaver** is pushing for action on arcane provisions in Social Security law that reduce or eliminate retirement benefits for many educators.

"Most of my retirement contributions to Social Security from my first career," says Cagle, "will simply disappear."

> **"MOST OF MY retirement contributions to Social Security from my first career will simply disappear."**
> —MARGARET CAGLE

Passed by Congress in 1983 as part of the Social Security Act, WEP and GPO are intended to prevent high-income workers from "double-dipping" by receiving full Social Security benefits. In practice, says NEA President Reg Weaver, these laws are denying public servants the benefits they or their spouses have earned.

WEP removes the so-called "windfall" for individuals who spent part of their careers in jobs not covered by Social Security. The GPO provision reduces public employees' Social Security spousal or survivor benefits by two-thirds of their public pension. Both offsets affect educators in 15 states: Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nevada, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Texas.

The reductions in benefits aren't trivial. Approximately 300,000 individuals, for example, lose an average of $3,600 a year because of GPO. And since educators and other public employees move from state to state, the impact of these offsets are being felt everywhere—and are hurting efforts to attract and retain quality educators.

In early February, Weaver stood with Margaret Cagle and Representatives Howard Berman (D-CA) and Buck McKeon (R-CA) at a Washington, D.C., press conference to call for the repeal of the WEP and GPO offsets. The time for congressional action, Weaver told the two members of Congress, is long overdue.

"NEA has been proud to work with both of you for many years as we have fought to repeal these unfair offsets," Weaver said. "But, as hard as you and we have worked, we are still waiting for action."

The wait may soon be over. On the first day of the new Congress, the Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 82), backed by more than 100 cosponsors, was reintroduced. The U.S. Senate soon followed by reintroducing the same bill, which would also eliminate the offsets.

Cagle is still a believer in teaching as an extraordinary opportunity to shape the future, but worries that she can't promise prospective educators that they won't suffer monetarily when they retire. As the country continues to face a shortage of qualified teachers, the government should be working to attract great teachers, not pushing them away, she says.

"Do we respect our teachers and education support professionals enough to ensure them a secure retirement?" Weaver asks. "Do we respect our children enough to want to provide the very best educators for them? Or do we want to keep discouraging dedicated and committed individuals from considering education professions?"

—TIM WALKER

FOR UPDATES ON REPEALING the GPO and WEP offsets, and to send a letter to your member of Congress, visit NEA's Legislative Action Center at www.nea.org/ref?3263.

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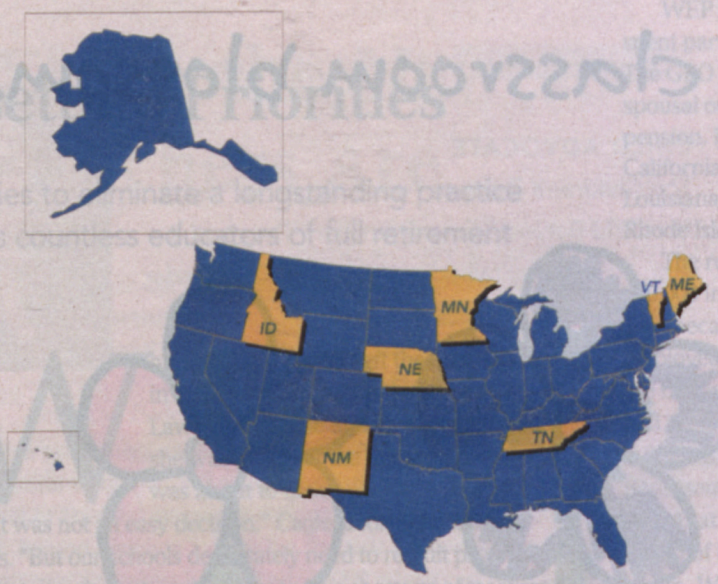

Can't Eat Prestige

MAINE By the time members of the ESP **Associated COLT Staff of the Universities of Maine** reached their last agreement with university officials, it was time to bargain their next contract. "We're hoping to build on the momentum," says UniServ Director John Bracciodieta, who is again assisting the local with negotiations, which started in February. "It was one of the best settlements in a decade." Nearly two years in the making, the current contract unfroze step movement to the maximum rate, kept health care affordable, and created a new $9.50 minimum hourly pay rate for all education support professionals (ESPs). Negotiators were aided by a member survey, "Personal Economies II: We Can't Eat Prestige," which revealed that employee wages were 22 percent below the state's per capita income, and 38 percent of workers needed state aid or financial help from family and friends to meet household costs. For more on the survey, visit www.nea.org/ref?3232.

$40K in '08

VERMONT The **Essex Junction Westford Education Association** settled a three-year contract that increases pay by 4.5 percent each year. Starting salaries will rise to $39,313 next year and $40,445 in 2008–09. The top teacher salary reaches $71,100 this year, $73,097 next year, and $75,203 in 2008–09. Health insurance co-payments for teachers in Essex Junction and Westford will increase to 12 percent over the next two years.

First-Ever ESP Contract

TENNESSEE **Memphis Education Association ESP** became the first ESP local in the history of the state to bargain a contract. Efforts to organize Memphis ESPs date back to 1988. A recent change in the district's administration paved the way, though under state law school districts are not obligated to enter into formal contract negotiations with school support staff. The new agreement increased the minimum wage to $10 per hour. Other employees received a 2 percent increase. "I no longer feel like an at-will employee," says bargaining committee member Cathy Beaty.

Lawsuit Settled

MINNESOTA When Julie Economy was involuntarily transferred from her first-grade teaching assignment to a fifth-grade position last spring, **Education Minnesota** claimed the transfer was made in retaliation for her union activities. The union filed an unfair labor practices lawsuit that was settled last fall, granting $12,000 to the local union, **EM-New Richland-Harlandale-Ellendale-Geneva.** The settlement acknowledges that involuntary transfers are a mandatory subject of bargaining, and allows the union the right to grieve violations of staff development laws. Before, administrators made all staff development decisions.

One for All

NEW MEXICO **NEA-New Mexico,** New Mexico School Boards Association, and other members of the New Mexico Education Partners coalition called on lawmakers to direct 50 cents of every new dollar in general fund revenues to schools. Doing so could raise approximately $300 million to help narrow achievement gaps, reduce class size, increase parental involvement, and attract and retain quality educators, supporters say. It is the first time that all 89 of the state's school boards passed the same resolution in support of a budget proposal. See www.nea-nm.org for updates.

New Locals Lining Up

NEBRASKA Two new ESP locals voted overwhelmingly to organize under **Nebraska State Education Association (NSEA)** representation. As a result, more than 60 new members joined **South Sioux City Education Association's** 279 certified members. The bargaining unit is focused on reviewing and improving the district's evaluation process. The **Neligh-Oakdale Education Association,** with 10 members, also held successful bargaining elections last year. ESPs, who now have eight active units in Nebraska, became eligible for membership in 1998. "While we have only a handful of locals, we do have a growing membership," says Jess Wolf, NSEA president. He says there are three other school districts organizing ESPs, plus other small pockets of membership.

Undeterred

IDAHO After a school funding proposition was narrowly voted down last November, members of the **Idaho Education Association (IEA)** are continuing the fight for adequate education funding. Defeated by only 5 percent of the vote, more than 204,000 citizens supported the measure. "They reflect a voice that cannot be ignored," says Sherri Wood, IEA's president. "We know many of the voters who did not support Prop 1 believe public schools need more funding. They disagreed with some aspect of the initiative, but nonetheless support public education." IEA is developing a plan to build support based in part on the "yes" votes.

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The 2007 Expo Classroom Makeover Contest (the "Contest") begins at 12:00:00 a.m. Central Standard Time ("CST") on January 21, 2007 and ends at 11:59:59 p.m. Central Daylight Time ("CDT") on October 15, 2007 (the "Promotion Period"). During the Promotion Period, there will be two entry periods for two separate prize pools (each an "Entry Period"). All entries for Entry Period #1 must be received between 12:00:00 a.m. CST on January 21, 2007 and 11:59:59 p.m. CDT on April 1, 2007, and all entries for Entry Period #2 must be received between 12:00:00 a.m. CDT on April 2, 2007 and 11:59:59 p.m. CDT on October 15, 2007. For complete Official Rules and to enter, visit www.expomarkers.com. Complete the online entry form and submit along with (a) an original essay of 100 words or less (written in English) describing why entrant's classroom deserves a makeover ("Essay"), and (b) a photograph ("Photo") of entrant's classroom which demonstrates the need for a makeover. No other method of entry will be accepted or acknowledged. The Contest is open only to K-12 teachers employed by a state-accredited educational institution (public or private) in the 50 United States or D.C. who are legal residents of the 50 United States or D.C., and are 21 years of age or older as of 1/20/07. All entries will be judged based on the following equally weighted criteria: (a) most compelling story with regard to need for a classroom makeover as set forth in Essay, (b) need for a classroom makeover based upon the Photograph, and (c) creativity of Essay content. The five (5) highest scoring entries for each Entry Period shall be declared the "finalists." The five finalists for Entry Period #1 will be determined on or about April 9, 2007. The five finalists for Entry Period #2 will be determined on or about October 22, 2007. Each of the finalists will then have their Essay and Photo along with their first and last name, school name and state of residency posted online at www.expomarkers.com. The public may then visit the web site and vote for the entrant who needs a classroom makeover most. Voting for Entry Period #1 begins at 12:00:00 a.m. CDT on April 25, 2007 and ends at 11:59:59 p.m. CDT, on June 4, 2007. Voting for Entry Period #2 begins at 12:00:00 a.m. CDT on October 31, 2007 and ends at 11:59:59 p.m. CST, on December 3, 2007. Limit one vote per person per Entry Period. Limit one vote per email address per Entry Period. Two (2) Grand Prize Awards: For each Entry Period, the school named on the entry form of the finalist who receives the most votes during the applicable Voting Period will receive a Grand Prize consisting of a $25,000 classroom makeover. Eight (8) First Place Prizes: A First Place Prize consisting of a $5,000 classroom makeover will be awarded to each of the schools named on the entry forms of the four non-Grand Prize winning finalists in each Entry Period.

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Parents Take the Wheel

More and more bus drivers are bringing their kids to work—and to school.

Faith Petrey has grown up riding school buses. When she started as a five-month-old, she needed a car seat. As a toddler, she played with stuffed animals and enjoyed snacks during her 30-mile runs.

Now in first grade, Faith, like many students, is content to catch up on homework on the bus before arriving home. After seven years, she's never missed a ride and has always had the same driver—her mother, Valerie Petrey.

When Faith was born, Petrey decided to leave her corporate job in human resources and apply for a bus driver position with Loudoun County Public Schools in Virginia.

"The county needed drivers, and I wanted to spend more time with my kids," says Petrey. So she got certified as a bus driver and was soon chauffeuring Faith and her three siblings to three different schools. Today, Faith is joined on the bus by Steven, 11, Rex, 12, and Veronica, 14.

"I don't know how I could ever go back to an office," says bus driver and parent **Valerie Petrey,** shown here with her children.

> **"THIS JOB ALLOWS ME** the opportunity to take [my kids] to school, pick them up, get them home, and get paid for it. There is so much flexibility."
>
> —VALERIE PETREY

"I never wanted them to be latchkey kids," Petrey says. "This job allows me the opportunity to take them to school, pick them up, get them home, and get paid for it. There is so much flexibility."

Having enough bus drivers is a common concern for school systems across the country, especially when a robust economy offers potential drivers other full-time job alternatives.

"Historically, when the economy is good, you have bus driver shortages in most parts of the country," says J. Michael Lunsford, Loudoun's director of transportation. "We are all competing for the same workers."

So Loudoun, like many districts, has increasingly turned to parents to operate the buses. About 70 percent of the district's 613 drivers chauffeur at least one of their children. With no age limit for drivers' children, infants requiring car seats are strapped into benches located directly behind the driver's seat.

Allowing drivers to bring small children on board has helped alleviate Loudoun's bus driver shortage, though the county still has about 50 unfilled positions. "If tomorrow they said we had to eliminate drivers' children on board, we'd have to close the school system," Lunsford says.

Drivers in Loudoun are paid a minimum of $15.90 an hour. Veterans can earn up to $29.60 hourly for a 20-hour week, 10 months a year. Petrey works about 185 days a year with full benefits. Her two-hour morning shift starts at about 7 a.m. She's then on her own until about 2 p.m., when she drives for another two hours, shuttling more than 110 students from local elementary, middle, and high schools. The flexible hours and nature of the job have allowed Petrey to volunteer at her children's schools and interact more with teachers, administrators, and parents.

"I feel like I'm in the know," says Petrey, a member of the Loudoun Education Association. "Other parents ask me to keep an eye out for their children."

Once overwhelmingly rural, Loudoun is now one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation. Over the years, the stay-at-home parents, teachers, retirees, farmers, and immigrants who drive school buses have changed, too.

"Twenty years ago, driving a school bus was a secondary income," Lunsford says. "For more and more of our drivers today, it is their primary income."

Petrey says another advantage of her job is driving past scenic horse farms, wineries, and brick-lined streets in the quaint small towns that share space with Loudoun's rapidly growing subdivisions.

"I remember once being way up high in the bus looking out the window," she says. "You're in the fresh air. I don't know how I could ever go back to an office."

—JOHN ROSALES

More ESP stories in this issue:

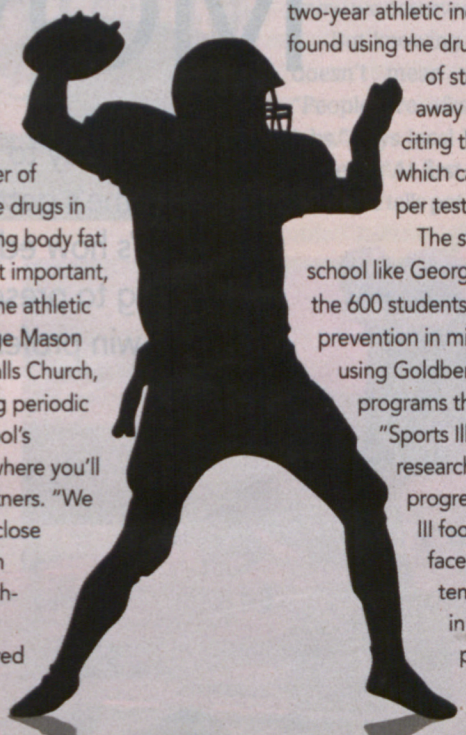
- Oregon bus drivers join in Read Across America – *Page 12*
- Memphis local wins state's first ESP contract – *Page 20*
- Fighting cuts to health care – *Page 28*

PHOTO: SANDY SCHAEFFER

Home Field Disadvantages

With steroid use on the rise, classroom educators find themselves on less-than-familiar ground.

BY CYNTHIA KOPKOWSKI



When six Connecticut high school students, including three football players from the state championship team, were caught with steroids two years ago, it wasn't a coach or trainer who made the discovery. It was a classroom teacher. Suspecting that pills inside a Rolaids container they were passing around weren't for indigestion, she went to the principal. Under questioning, the boys admitted they were taking performance-enhancing drugs.

Steroid use among high school students has doubled since the early 1990s, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In a recent CDC survey, nearly 850,000 high school students admitted using the drugs. The arrest of the Connecticut students came one month after nine players on one high school football team in Texas confessed to using steroids. Experts say that pressure on high school athletes is escalating, with coaches, parents, and the athletes themselves hungry for attention-grabbing game stats, championships, and scholarships.

But here's what makes this a particularly insidious drug for teachers and education support professionals to detect: the most common signs that a student is using steroids are mood swings, acne, physical changes, and sudden, unexplained aggressive behavior. Sound like any of the high school students you know?

Linn Goldberg, founder of two gender-specific steroid-prevention programs used in 30 states, says that educators should look for behavioral and physical signs that are more intense than in the typical teenager. Involve school counselors and administrators if you suspect steroid use. Be aware, too, that it's not just athletes at risk. Experts say a growing number of girls are using the drugs in the hopes of losing body fat.

Perhaps most important, says Tom Horn, the athletic director of George Mason High School in Falls Church, Virginia, is making periodic trips to your school's coaches' office, where you'll find valuable partners. "We need to work to close that gap between coaches and teachers," Horn says. "Information shared will benefit the students tremendously."

For example, a student suddenly sleeping in class more, pounding the desk when getting a bad grade, and not turning in homework may also be fighting with teammates in the locker room or rapidly bulking up. Or perhaps the student recently lost a starting position and that's made him or her moody. Either way, coaches and teachers need to work together to get a clear picture of what's happening, Horn says.

State legislators are also getting in the prevention and detection game: Virginia, New Jersey, California, Illinois, and Texas have all passed laws concerning high school steroid use. Virginia's legislation requires two-year athletic ineligibility for any student found using the drug. Yet a greater number of states continue to shy away from such legislation, citing the cost of screening, which can be as much as $100 per test.

The stakes are high at a school like George Mason, where 450 of the 600 students are athletes. With prevention in mind, Horn's school began using Goldberg's ATLAS and ATHENA programs this year, making it a "Sports Illustrated school" where researchers closely monitor progress. As a former Division III football player, Horn was faced regularly with the temptation of steroid use in college and knows the pressure student athletes feel.

"It's not only in their own minds," he says. "There is pressure from adults to maximize their potential, starting at a young age." And once one student travels that road, they're likely to be followed. "It's one of those viral activities," he says. "If you have one steroid user, you're likely to have a few." nea

Steroids 101

NICKNAMES: 'roids, juice, hype, pump

STEROID TYPES: Anabolic steroids are taken to increase body mass. But prescription corticosteroids are used legitimately to treat common medical conditions such as asthma and arthritis and don't increase body mass.

HOW THEY'RE TAKEN: Pills, liquid injected with a needle

PHYSICAL SIDE EFFECTS: Severe acne, nausea and vomiting, headaches, aching joints, muscle cramps, high blood pressure, diarrhea, baldness. Also in females: increase in facial and body hair, deepened voice, reduced breast size.

EMOTIONAL SIDE EFFECTS: increased aggression, severe mood swings, hallucinations, paranoia, anxiety and panic attacks, depression.

SOURCE: AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS, WWW.AAP.ORG/FAMILY/STEROIDS.HTM

ILLUSTRATION: NEIL EVANS

NEW MONEY MOVES

From pay to pensions, the game's getting tougher. Here's how educators are fighting to preserve benefits and win professional pay.

You take care of the kids, but who takes care of you? The people who prepare the next generation of Americans for the challenges of 21st century living—that's you—are falling behind. Professionals in many other fields are benefiting from America's economic growth, but teachers and education support professionals (ESPs) are treading water at best.

Improving compensation for educators is one of NEA's top priorities. NEA has set a national goal of achieving starting pay of at least a living wage for all ESPs and $40,000 a year for teachers. But there are other games afoot. Some states or districts want to offer pay raises only to a minority of teachers, using "alternative compensation" plans that pit educators against each other, undermining collaborative efforts and quality teaching. Others are proposing changes in health insurance and retirement benefits that would threaten the living standards and security of our profession. If these moves haven't come to your town yet, they may well arrive soon, so get ready.

From Pennsylvania, Florida, and Kentucky to Texas, Vermont, and Minnesota, NEA members are fighting back. The compensation game is getting harder and more complicated, but by working together, educators can win.

PHOTO: GROFF CREATIVE, INC.

Attitude Counts!

How to ask for—and get—higher pay.

BY ALAIN JEHLEN

As a deadlock on teacher contracts hung over the rural Pennsylvania Homer-Center school district, fifth-grade teacher Sherry Dellaposta started shopping out of town. "At the bank, at the post office, a lot of people said things like: 'You teachers don't realize that we're not making that kind of money. You're asking for the moon,'" she recalls.

An anti-teacher school board wanted to cut health benefits and slash starting salaries 28 percent. And Homer-Center, some 35 miles east of Pittsburgh, was not where you'd expect to find generous contracts. "Ours was a coal mining community, and the mines closed down," explains Jane Mastro, head of the 71-member Homer-Center Education Association.

Dellaposta, a lifelong resident and coal miner's daughter, was stung by her neighbors' criticism. But she would answer, "I'm a professional. I worked hard for my degree, and I work hard in school. It's not a seven- or eight-hour job. You're always planning lessons and finding things for your bulletin boards."

Despite its economic problems, the community wanted good teachers and quality schools for its children. Voters replaced half of the school board, with the union playing a significant role. The new board and the union let an arbitrator settle their dispute. Since then, they've worked together to attract and hold the best teachers. Starting pay has gone from $33,270 in 1997, when the conflict began, to $43,832, one of the highest in the state. By 2009–10, starting salaries will jump to $52,012.

Homer-Center used to lose good teachers to nearby, higher-paying districts, but now the opposite is happening—it has its pick of new teachers and neighboring districts are under pressure to pay more. "Homer-Center has boosted salaries throughout the county," says UniSérv Director Robert Paskowski.

To win professional salaries, says Education Minnesota President Judy Schaubach, educators need to stand firm on what they bring to communities like Homer-Center. "People have been talking about the lack of funding for so long that we've lowered our expectations," she says. "We've become accustomed to making do—finding ways of providing for our students, at the expense of our own salaries. But unless we believe in and assert our own worth, we'll never get the funding we need."

In eastern Kentucky, John Boggs had no trouble convincing his co-workers their pay was too low. He was earning just over $12,000 a year driving a school bus. "I don't see how anybody can raise a family on what we were making," says Boggs, head of the local ESP union and a part-time minister. "Everybody knew we deserved more."

But knowing you're worth more doesn't mean you'll demand it. "People are afraid of losing their jobs," says local Vice President Pam Pereece. "At first, I was scared, too." Now, she tells potential members that the union's lawyers will protect them if they're unfairly targeted.

Kentucky's **John Boggs** and Pennsylvania's **Sherry Dellaposta** stood up for higher pay.

Pereece and Boggs played leading roles in the support professionals' living wage campaign last year, in which members appealed for public and school board support to bring their pay up to at least the poverty level for a family of three—$18,000 a year. Members wrote to the local newspaper and held petition drives, garnering 1,500 signatures. "People were shocked—they didn't realize how little we were making," says Boggs.

Even the school board didn't fully grasp how little their ESPs earned, Boggs adds. Ultimately they won significant raises—still not up to the poverty level, but Boggs says they hope to get close this year.

"We say to the board, 'Just be fair.'"

Take action in your own district. Visit NEA's Professional Pay site at www.nea.org/ref?3242 to learn how to plan a campaign, or just how to respond to such age-old chestnuts as "teachers get the summer off."

"We've become accustomed to making do—finding ways of providing for our students, at the expense of our own salaries. But unless we believe in and assert our own worth, we'll never get the funding we need." —JUDY SCHAUBACH

PHOTOS TOP: JAMES CRISP; BOTTOM: AP IMAGES/JOHN HELLER

A Risky Alternative

Educators find the devil's in the details in proposals to alter traditional salary schedules.

BY ALAIN JEHLEN

Art teacher Maureen Gunderson and her fellow educators in Le Center, Minnesota, thought they had a great—and fair—plan for using the state's new alternative compensation money to improve student achievement in their small, rural town.

"We were really excited," she says. "We thought we had designed something that could be a model for small schools."

Six months, five rejections, five resubmissions, and one lawsuit later, state officials reluctantly approved it—on the same day they would have been forced by a court to release records detailing why all the earlier versions of the proposal were turned down. (The lawsuit was brought by Education Minnesota, a joint affiliate of NEA and the American Federation of Teachers.)

What was the sticking point? Officials never said so in writing, but they warned in a phone call that the plan would never be approved unless the district changed the way teachers were judged to be eligible for a bonus.

Le Center wanted teachers to earn most of their extra pay by working with small groups of their peers, analyzing and evaluating each other's videotaped lessons. The state wanted teachers rated by someone at a higher level.

Minnesota is one hot spot in a national controversy over efforts to replace the traditional salary schedule with some version of alternative compensation. Districts have long paid extra for coaches and faculty advisors of clubs, and growing numbers pay stipends to teachers who become mentors. NEA local affiliates often push for extending this approach to educators who take on other types of leadership roles. There's also support in some local and state Associations for paying teachers more if they teach in "hard-to-staff" schools—those where large numbers of students do not arrive at the schoolhouse door ready to learn. So far, though, only a few districts offer such bonuses, and they have been too small to make much difference.

Another form of incentive pay that some administrators favor is for educators in subjects where there are shortages, such as math and science. Many educators oppose this approach because it suggests that those who teach other subjects are worth less.

But the biggest conflicts are over proposals to tie teacher pay to student test scores. Most teachers say these pay systems put them at the mercy of conditions they have no control over and penalize educators who take on the toughest work. Educators also worry that such plans pit teachers against each other and keep them from working collaboratively.

There's much talk about these so-called "pay-for-performance" plans, but after a spurt of interest in the 1980s and 1990s, not much action. University of Washington researcher Dan Goldhaber says 6 percent of districts with collective bargaining contracts and 11 percent of those without them now have pay-for-performance plans. He points out that these numbers prove that union opposition isn't the only obstacle to implementing such pay systems.

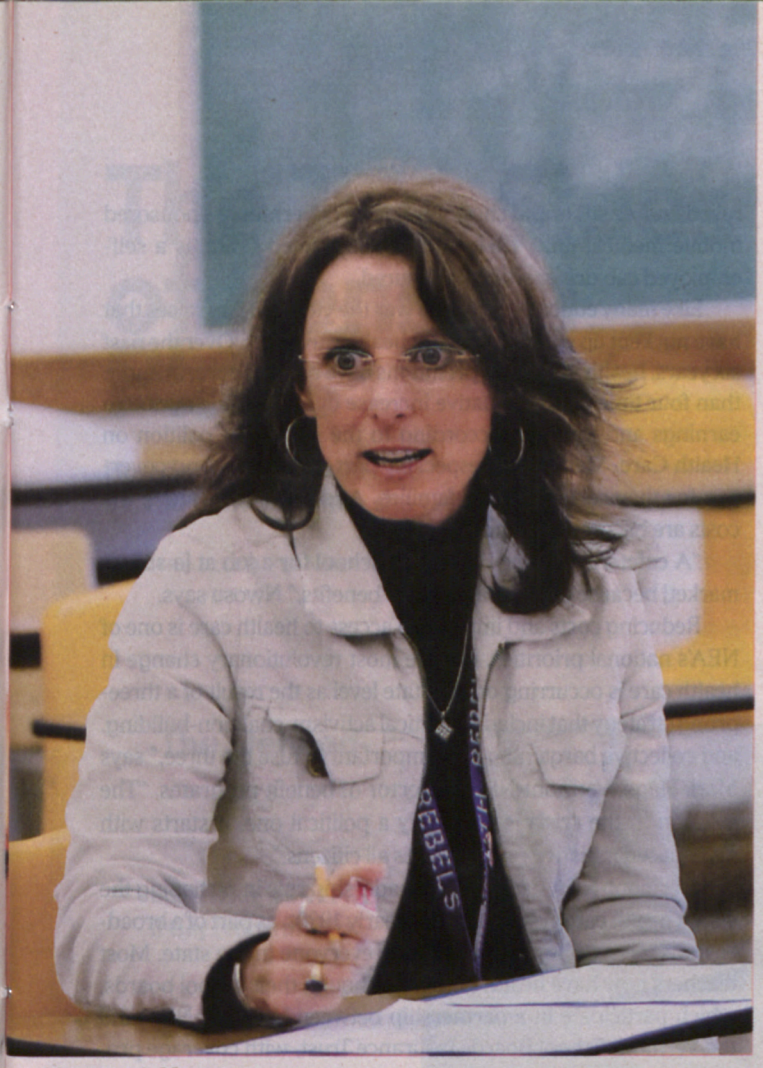
Former National Teacher of the Year Chauncey Veatch gets disappointed with school leaders who put all their energy into devising pay-for-performance plans to the exclusion of more important issues,

like class size. "When I started teaching, I had 45 eighth-graders," he says. "That could be a deal-breaker for some new teachers."

Earlier attempts at pay-for-performance were largely abandoned when money ran out. But recently, such plans have resurfaced. The Bush Administration is promoting these plans with $42 million in grants so far and $43 million more on the way.

One of the most widely publicized experiments is underway in Denver, under a contract with the Denver Classroom Teachers Association, which played a key role in designing it. Called ProComp, Denver's system is mandatory for new hires but optional for existing educators. Teachers in ProComp don't get yearly step increases, but they have a variety of ways to earn raises. These include "knowledge and skills" increases for advanced degrees and professional development, extra money for hard-to-fill jobs and hard-to-staff schools, and salary bumps

"We're developing a learning community that wouldn't have been there if we had someone on one level evaluating us on a lower level. I'm really glad we fought and held our ground." —MAUREEN GUNDERSON



Minnesota's **Maureen Gunderson** (left) and Colorado's **Barbara DeHaven Bennett** are both under new plans.

that depend on students meeting specific goals.

Union President Kim Ursetta starts all of her presentations on the Denver plan with: "Don't try this at home."

Why not? Because, she says, Denver has several special conditions that make its plan work, starting with money.

The agreement hinged on voter approval of an additional $25 million per year for salaries, which will be increased with inflation—enough for serious raises.

Denver also has teacher participation in the new system—five teachers chosen by the union are working on it full-time. And for salary increases tied to students meeting goals, there's no one-size-fits-all standard. Each teacher works out the goals with the principal. If a goal turns out to be unachievable, it can be changed. A typical goal, says Ursetta, might be that 75 percent of a teacher's students will be on grade level by the end of the year. "But in January, you look at your students' progress and see whether that's realistic," she says. "If not, you might change it to 70 percent."

On top of that, the raises triggered by students meeting goals are relatively small—the biggest increases are for "knowledge and skills."

Learn why it's important for educators to have a say in developing plans like Minnesota's. Read about the experience of another district at www.nea.org/ref?3244.

The Denver program was pilot-tested in 17 schools. Ursetta says teachers in the pilot schools started having a lot more informal conversations about how to help students achieve. That's one thing that convinced her it was working.

So far, 38 percent of the district's veteran teachers have opted in. Most of them, says Ursetta, are experienced teachers at the top of the pay scale so they could not expect much in the way of future raises from the traditional system. One was math teacher Barbara DeHaven Bennett. She originally opposed the plan, even though it would help her personally because she had many course credits worth thousands of dollars a year under ProComp. "But I'm not convinced that down the road, this will be viable," she says. "Say you're a third-year teacher. You have to jump through lots of hoops to get raises here. But you can go to another district and get automatic step increases. I think we will have more people leaving."

In Florida, educators are fighting a pay-for-performance plan that specifies no more than a quarter of a district's teachers can get extra pay—even if every teacher is a star performer. And the decision of which teachers to reward has to rest at least 50 percent on test scores.

The Florida Education Association has gone to court to stop the program. Meanwhile, some districts are turning down the money. The first was Okaloosa County. Fifth-grade teacher Karen Peek was one of the 84 percent of teachers who voted down the bonus program. "I love my job and I do the best I can every day," she says. "You could offer me $2 million and I couldn't do it better. Give me a raise—that would be great—but don't imply that I am holding back and not doing the best I can now."

In Minnesota, the law is a compromise between the governor's plan and the local control advocated by Education Minnesota. State bureaucrats seem to be trying to push districts towards the governor's rigid, hierarchical program, but the law does not require it, and that's why the Le Center teachers finally won approval of their locally developed plan.

There's no limit to how many Le Center teachers can get the money. The program is structured to improve everybody's teaching. Of the $2,340 maximum bonus, about $350 depends on an administrator's evaluation. Another $200 rides on students meeting a growth target for math scores. (The law requires some connection to test scores.) Each teacher can earn another $1,070 by taking part in the small group lesson analysis program. The rest—about $700—is based on peer evaluations.

Art teacher Gunderson says her students are already benefiting. She recently discussed a lesson with her group, and came away with practical ways to do better.

"We're developing a learning community that wouldn't have been there if we had someone on one level evaluating us on a lower level," she says. "I'm really glad we fought and held our ground."

"You could offer me $2 million and I couldn't do [my job] better. Give me a raise—that would be great—but don't imply that I am holding back and not doing the best I can now." —KAREN PEEK

PHOTOS LEFT: JANET HOSTETTER; PHOTO RIGHT: RICK GIASE

Nwosu

An Unhealthy System

Rising health insurance costs aren't limited to educators, who look to build bridges while fighting to preserve existing benefits.

BY JOHN ROSALES

When teenager Osita Nwosu fell on a broken bottle while playing basketball, his mother, Rae Nwosu, didn't flinch at rushing him to the hospital. The cut was deep.

"He was bleeding pretty badly," says Nwosu, a secretary with Paredes Middle School in Austin, Texas. Her family has no health insurance—and is still chipping away at a payment plan for the stitches and antibiotics Osita received nearly four years ago. "It's a bill we're still paying," says Nwosu of the 2003 incident.

Nwosu had been forced to drop the health insurance plan offered by the Austin Independent School District (AISD). "It had just gotten too expensive," she says. The AISD pays an employee-only premium of $381 for teachers and education support professionals (ESPs) to enroll in an HMO. Employees must foot the cost of insuring family members. After deductions from her $25,000 salary, Nwosu brings home about $800 a month, which barely clears the $763 cost for family coverage, leaving almost no money for other necessities.

Since dropping the plan, Osita, now 21, and his 19-year-old sister, Jena, have not had regular physicals and vaccinations. For a time, they relied on free shots and checkups from a government-sponsored mobile medical unit. Their father, also named Osita, is a self-employed cab driver who is uninsured.

Like many educators, Nwosu was the victim of pay raises that have not kept up with increases in health care costs. Over the past six years, health insurance premiums have risen 87 percent, more than four times the cumulative increase over the same period in earnings and inflation, according to the National Coalition on Health Care. Many ESPs, especially part-timers, have no coverage for themselves or their families. And for all educators, the costs are becoming prohibitive.

"A cafeteria worker I know left school for a job at [a supermarket] because of their health care benefits," Nwosu says.

Reducing costs and improving access to health care is one of NEA's national priorities. But the most revolutionary change in health care is occurring on the state level as the result of a three-prong strategy that includes political activism, coalition-building, and collective bargaining. "It's important to fuse the three," says Mark Hage, Vermont-NEA's director of benefit programs. "The solution to the crisis is ultimately a political one. It starts with state-based initiatives and involves all citizens."

Vermont-NEA has played a leadership role in reshaping the state's health care system since the early 1990s, as part of a broader movement to improve access for everyone in the state. Most teachers now have health insurance though their school boards, which participate in a partnership between Vermont-NEA and the Vermont School Boards Insurance Trust, with coverage provided by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont. Some support staff have coverage at a reasonable cost, though others have none.

"Every school district participates in the trust," Hage says. "[Educators] are not out there at the mercy of the market."

The trust was created after years of coalition-building. In 2005, Vermont–NEA and others from business, labor, government, consumer, and other community organizations formed a group named Coalition 21, with the goal of providing comprehensive lifetime health coverage for all Vermonters. Last year, some of its principles were written into legislation.

"We laid a foundation for structural reform," Hage says.

But in other states, educators have had to fight just to maintain existing benefits. About five years ago, Texas passed a bill to contribute $1,000 towards health insurance costs for every school employee. Nwosu, who is treasurer of Education Austin, lobbied for the bill and gave testimony at committee meetings. But facing budget cuts, legislators ultimately reclaimed half of the allotment. Last year, they attempted to take the final $500 back—but just from ESPs. Nwosu and other community members fought the measure by meeting with reporters in the rotunda under the famous Texas statehouse dome.

"We got coverage statewide," she says. "They eventually withdrew the bill."

Lend your voice to the national call for affordable health care by contacting your lawmakers through NEA's Legislative Action Center at www.nea.org/ref?3246.

"The solution to the crisis is ultimately a political one [that] involves all citizens.... We laid a foundation for structural reform." —MARK HAGE

PHOTO: MARK MATSON

The Two Sides of Pension Plans

How Sandy Gay could lose $1,100 a month when she retires.

BY MARY ELLEN FLANNERY

After 32 years in the classroom, Sandy Gay wants to retire. She loves her job and her second-graders at Princeton Primary School in southern West Virginia, but she's 62 years old, and she's got a granddaughter with disabilities who needs her special care. There's just one problem: Since she made the ill-informed decision in 1991 to switch from the state's traditional pension plan to a much-heralded 401(k)-style "defined-contribution" plan, Gay can't afford to.

Although West Virginia teachers voted decisively last year to return everybody to a defined-benefit plan (all teachers hired since 2005 already are enrolled in it), the move was legally challenged and a circuit court judge overturned the planned merger in January. Now, Gay can hope for a legislative solution—which is far from certain. "[In 1991] everyone assured me the switch would be great—but those were all falsehoods!" Gay says. Meanwhile, "the years go on, and I'm getting older," she adds.

The Defined-Contribution Plan

MONTHLY BENEFIT,
if Gay retires in June*:

$1,397

TOTAL SAVINGS SINCE 1991:
About $96,000

What is a Defined-Contribution Plan?
These are individual, tax-deferred investment accounts funded by the employee, and often by the employer, too—with no guarantee of how much you'll get each month at retirement. It's up to employees to decide how the money will be invested—and many accounts do poorly. In West Virginia, for example, only 74 of the 22,000 teachers in the defined-contribution plan have accrued more than $100,000 over the course of their careers.

NAME: Sandy Gay
AGE: 62
HOMETOWN: Princeton, West Virginia
JOB: Second-grade teacher
SALARY: About $45,000

Learn how to fight attacks on retirement plans. Download NEA's Retirement Security Toolkit, which offers research, more resources, and concrete steps you can take to protect your retirement income at www.nea.org/ref?3248.

The Defined-Benefit Plan

MONTHLY BENEFIT,
if Gay retires in June**:

$2,499

What is a Defined-Benefit Plan?
A traditional pension plan, usually administered by the state. The benefits? You'll know how much money you're getting when you retire; the benefit is guaranteed; and professionals who know what they're doing will manage your money.

* Assumes a 4 percent return and purchase of a lifetime annuity. Also, take note: More than half of this amount—$751 a month—is money that Gay earned in the defined-benefit pension plan before switching to a defined-contribution system in 1991.

** Assumes a one-time make-up contribution by Gay of $8,064, and also that the Legislature steps in to allow teachers back into the plan—and that's a big maybe.

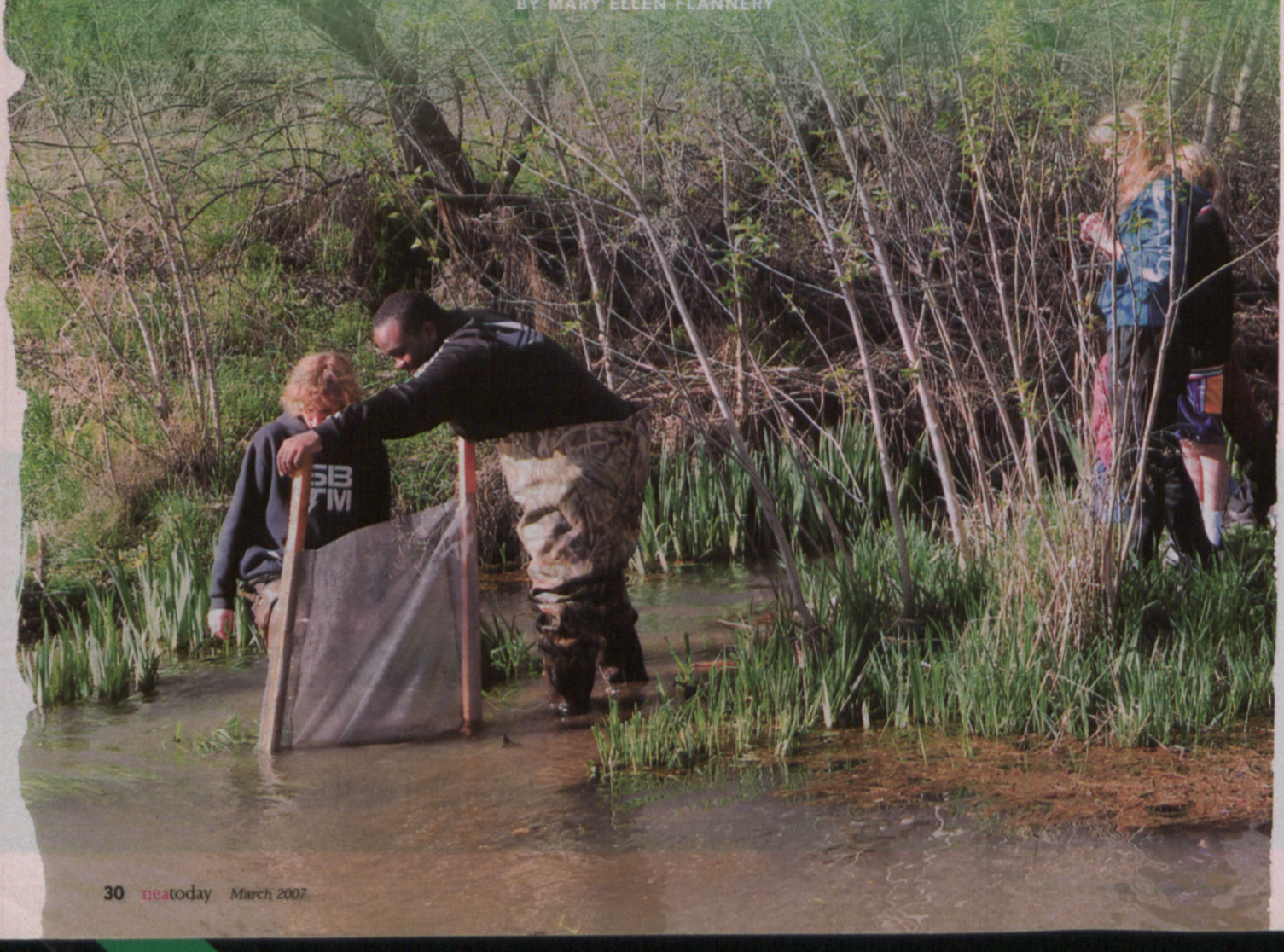
"Everyone assured me the switch [to a defined-contribution plan] would be great—but those were all falsehoods!" — SANDY GAY

PHOTO: JOHN NELSON

Over the River and Through the Woods

To the art museum, the state capitol, or even the grocery store we go! With money tight and testing pressures mounting, teachers are finding new ways to make field trips fly.

BY MARY ELLEN FLANNERY



Annette Hanson is nervous. This spring morning, she'll take 28 high school freshmen, and an equal number of fourth-graders, to a Boise River offshoot. She's done it before and never had so much as a wet knee. But today, the creek is running around like a sugar-happy toddler, bouncing off its banks, giggling at its strength. As winter's snow melts in the hills above, headlines warn, "More flooding on the way for Treasure Valley."

When Tom Frew, a field biologist with Idaho Fish & Game, shows up to Hanson's biology classroom at Timberline High in Boise, he asks her, "How're we doing this morning?"

"Oh, you know…" she replies nervously.

"Oh yeah!" he grins. "It's rocking and rolling out there!"

But this is the nature of field trips. They're a little unpredictable, maybe a little nerve-wracking, certainly lots of work, and yet, completely worth it.

"You hope that you can inspire their interest, and that they'll see that science is more than what happens in the classroom," Hanson muses. "At the end of the year, they always tell me that these lessons are what they remember best."

Unfortunately, as education funds disappear and pressure to perform on high-stakes tests grows, it's getting harder for teachers to find the time or money for these walks in the woods. What a mistake, argues Kathleen Carroll, a former science teacher and author of *A Guide to Great Field Trips*. "When we get so bound up into thinking we need to prepare students for the test, students suffer—and teachers get burned out. Their life blood is sucked out of them."

A host of education studies has shown students actually do better on tests when they have "a full interactive experience of learning," Carroll says. Plus, a great field trip also will help students develop an interest in learning, a "sense of awe and curiosity" that pays off in the long run, she adds. And, researchers believe outside experiences may have the power to help close the achievement gaps. So even with money tight and testing pressures mounting, teachers are finding creative, often close-to-home ways to get students out of the building and learning in new ways. "People are cutting off their own noses if they think they have to give up field trips for test scores," Carroll says.

Hanson knows these pressures well. Her school used to pay for two trips with buses for each teacher each year. Now it pays for just one. Plus, as Idaho introduces its new standards-based state science test, the heat is on. Her solution? Take just two hours, or one block period, and walk a mile to the nearest body of water for a hands-on lesson on habitats. The total cost? A few calories and a couple of gray hairs.

Field trips easily can be part of a standards-based curriculum—and they often do a more effective job than the typical textbook, teachers say. In Oklahoma, fourth- and fifth-graders must learn how state government works, so elementary school teacher LeeAnne Powers asked herself: Aren't the halls of the Capitol the best place for that lesson? Powers introduced her students to state legislators who told them in person how laws are made. They stopped at the state historical museum to learn more about early settlers (another state standard). And, as they traveled, they kept track of mileage and landforms.

"The students will be tested on all of [this] and more, so why not give them an experience that they will remember?" she asks.

And, for many kids, especially poor ones, the lessons go far beyond the standards. Tracy Jones teaches at a Title 1 elementary school in Southern California. On a trip last year to a San Diego aquarium, her students saw firsthand how animals inhabit different environments—a standard of learning—but, even more exciting, many also got their first glimpse of the ocean. "You should have heard the kids as the bus came over the hill and they saw the sun shining on the Pacific Ocean," Jones says.

Providing these kinds of experiences may be one of the keys to closing the achievement gaps, suggests Harvard economist Ronald Ferguson. "Achievement gaps are not facts of nature. They are mostly because of differences in life experiences," he said in a recent *Harvard Education Letter* interview. "We've got to figure out how to get all kids the kinds of experiences that really maximize access to middle-class skills."

And it doesn't have to be expensive. Minnesota high school teacher Monique Ami simply takes her English-language learners to the library and signs them up for cards. And California teacher Samantha Garrity goes someplace even more familiar—the mall! Her students have to solve math problems dealing with percentages, and the field trip costs about a dollar per kid.

But field trips can't just rely on great weather and setting. What happens before—and after—are equally important. If you're not a list person, pick up your pen anyway. Along with permission forms, transportation, and meal plans, jot down a purpose statement to help focus you and the kids. What should they learn? Pre-activities such as vocabulary lists also help.

For Hanson, the lessons on habitats start weeks before the trip. Then, that morning, she divides her class into teams—the Insect

Sometimes the best field trips are those just a short walk from the school building, as **Annette Hanson's** science students discover.

PHOTOS: ANDREW RAFKIND

People, the Water Testers, etc.—and hands out detailed packages of maps, guides, and other instructions. They'll meet with Carrie Prange's Riverside Elementary fourth-graders on the banks of Loggers Creek, where the freshmen will lead the younger students through lab tasks. She also stresses two rules.

Rule No. 1: "Remember, you are role models!"

Rule No. 2: "Be kind to animals and all living things."

Yes, yes, her kids nod. They've heard it before. They kick back their lab stools and leave impatiently for the walk.

Other successful trip-takers plan just as carefully. Jones, the aquarium-goer, spent a month identifying local tide pool animals and explaining symbiotic relationships and the food chain. Before the trip, she went on her own, writing down a list of the animals in each tank so that the parent chaperones would be able to direct their group's attention.

Back in Idaho, on the creek banks, the forecast proves true. Icy water screams past, as a long-haired freshman in a black Metallica shirt points to a cedar tree parting the icy flow.

"That used to be three feet from the shore!" he says.

The kids work diligently on their own tasks: Measuring the water temperature (a cool 40 degrees); checking bottom conditions (a tad silty); collecting plants and insects; and making note of all life. Canadian geese are mocked. Too common! For a skinny blue heron wheeling leisurely above, talk ceases. Then, with scribbled notes and neat measurements, they put together a profile of the habitat. In a word, it is perfect—for baby trout, that is.

Hours later, heading back to class with completely dry students, Hanson will smile and say, "I love doing these trips!"

The following day, back in the lab, her class will examine their loot under a dissecting microscope (the leeches are a big hit), map their findings, and discuss what they learned about the relationship between wildlife and habitat. Such post-trip assessments are critical, Carroll advises.

Days later, Hanson will receive even more validation. "I wanted to let you know that last week's trip was great for Joe!" begins a letter from a parent. "[Yesterday, he drove us to the river path] to share with us the high river level, the heron 'family' nest...and teach us about the nitrate tests. Joe has enjoyed science more than I can remember. Thank you!" nea

Send comments on this story to mflannery@nea.org.

GOING VIRTUAL

No budget for field trips? Miles from cultural sites? Then put down those permission slips and pick up your mouse!

JOURNEY BACK TO 1874

New York and the Lower East Side tenement of Nathalie Gumpertz, a German immigrant who makes dresses in her apartment to support her daughters. This is one stop on the virtual tour of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, where students visit five families who lived at 97 Orchard Street over the span of 70 years, reflecting the area's changing ethnicity as waves of immigrants entered America. Audio and text guides help students learn about the cultures and traditions of the families and the history of the Lower East Side and of the development of social welfare in the United States. Visit www.tenement.org.

Most museums offer virtual tours, and many meet national standards. For a comprehensive list, visit the American Association of Museums at www.aam-us.org.

AT EFIELDTRIPS.ORG, your class can visit Carlsbad Caverns and watch a giant cloud of 300,000 bats swoosh from the mouth of a cave for their twilight feeding; climb Mt. McKinley in Denali National Park; or get up close and personal with alligators, snakes, and other creatures of the Florida Everglades. The site offers 23 standards-based field trips, most of which have a conservation or environmental theme.

What sets eFieldTrips apart is a live chat feature that lets students make real connections with rangers and education specialists. "Some of the questions are great," says site founder Rick Givident. "We got more than 400 questions on one of our Carlsbad Caverns visits. My favorite was from a student [who] wanted to know if all of the bats were given rabies shots."

DID LIFE EXIST ON MARS?

Join NASA researchers to find out. In Western Australia, researchers are studying minerals containing fossils of stromatolites, the oldest known life on Earth. Data from spacecraft exploring Mars show that water once flowed on the Red Planet, which might have supported life like the 3.5 billion-year-old microbial organisms.

Virtual tourists get a 360-degree view of the red, dusty environment and can access videos where experts explain what the students see. The experts note points of interest, and students can jump from one location to another. It's a heavy download at http://quest.arc.nasa.gov/vft, but most say it's worthwhile.

"In addition to [students], we also have a huge interest from scientists and post-doc students unable to go on the expeditions," says site developer Geoffrey Bruce.

That's exactly why virtual field trips are so useful, according to Kim Foley, co-founder and site developer of Tramline. "Virtual field trips offer a way to experience places that otherwise would not be possible," she says. "For instance, a trip to Jupiter is not currently accessible—or for that matter, even the other side of one's state." On the Tramline site (www.field-guides.com), educators can create and post their own virtual field trips using the company's TourMaker software, join a discussion list, and take a variety of age-specific K–12 field trips.

Patricia Hawkenson, a sixth-grade teacher at South Middle School in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, uses virtual field trips to enhance classroom instruction and engage her students. "They love it," she says. "A few years ago my students 'traveled' around the world with Linda Finch as she recreated the flight path of Amelia Earhart. The e-mails she sent back from her cockpit brought the experience to life in a way that couldn't be found in the pages of the best reference book...Students don't need raincoats or steel-toed shoes, and they can view topics directly from the experts in the field."

For more virtual field trip resources, visit www.nea.org/ref?3234.

PHOTO: ANDREW RAFKIND

Minimally Adequate?

A judge says South Carolina's rural schools meet the constitutional requirement. Student photographers prove him wrong.

Sagging ceilings covered with plastic sheeting. Computer labs full of broken equipment. Chipped and cracked toilets, and holes in the walls. They all raise the question: What's "minimally adequate" for educating South Carolina's children? The state's Supreme Court has ruled that the constitution mandates a "minimally adequate" education. Forty districts have sued, saying the state's school funding system doesn't pass muster.

In late 2005, Judge Thomas Cooper ruled against them, but the plaintiffs plan to appeal. A documentary, *Corridor of Shame*, supports the plaintiffs' case, and the producers organized a legion of student photographers to depict what's at stake for South Carolina's poor, rural counties. Their pictures, along with the film, were used to create an eye-opening exhibit that's now touring the state.

South Carolina isn't alone—similar lawsuits have been decided or are pending in other states. For more on the case and the student project, visit **www.corridorofshame.com**.

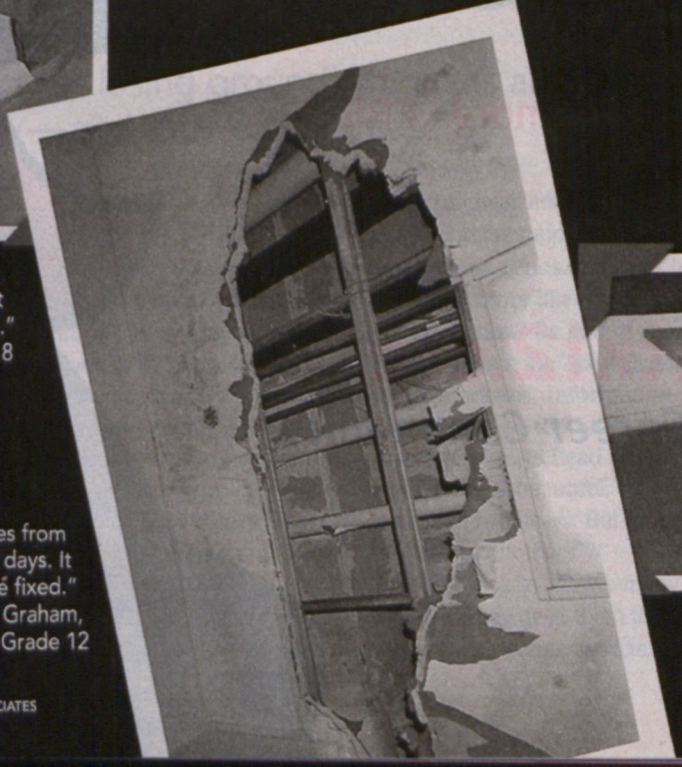
—ALAIN JEHLEN

"I'm not supposed to get sick today."
— Tierra Henderson, Grade 5

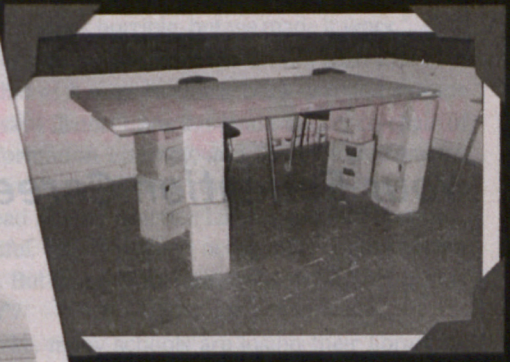
"We can't see out of our classroom windows."
— Janai Cabrera, Grade 8

"Our drinking fountain. Would you like to drink from here?"
— Sherry Calhoun, Grade 12

"I don't ever use the restroom at my school. It stinks and depresses me."
— Janai Cabrera, Grade 8



"The hole comes from a leak on rainy days. It needs to be fixed."
— Cheroroa Graham, Grade 12



"Blocks used to create a table."
—Shaquavia Springer, Grade 6

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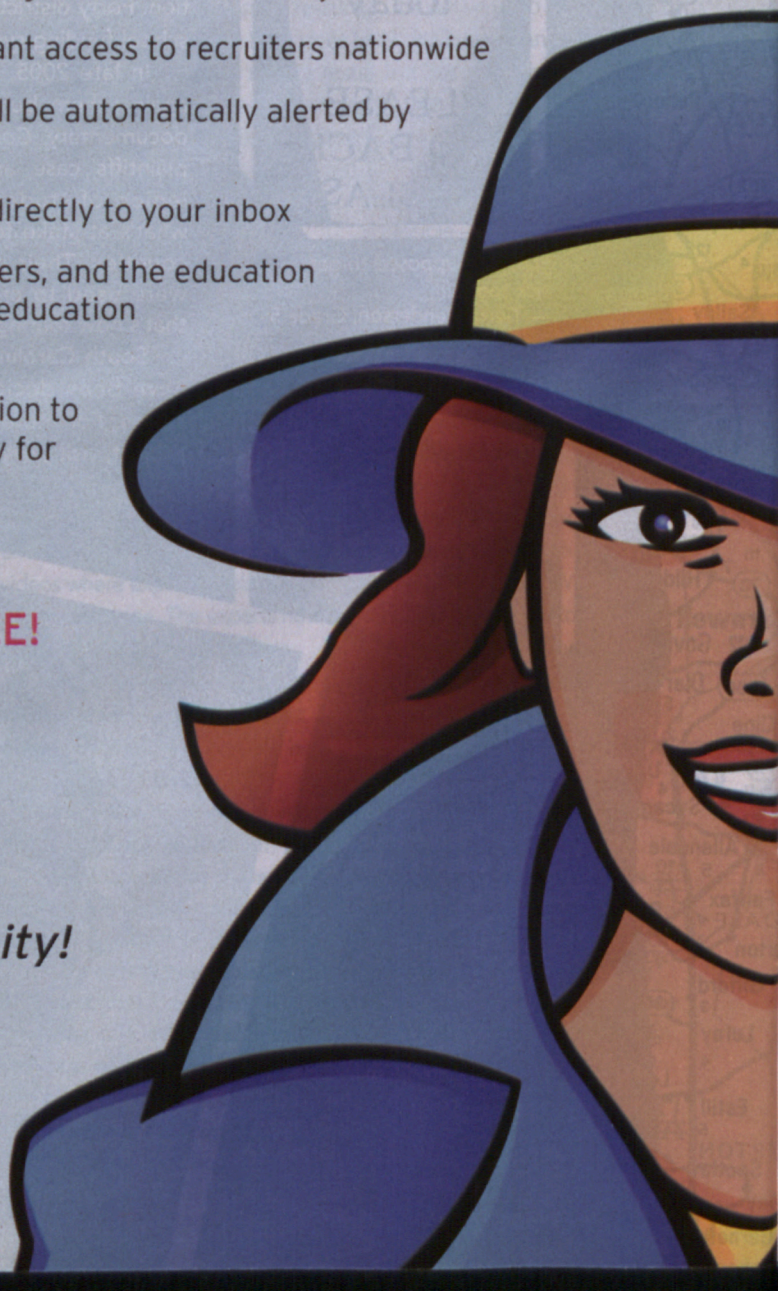

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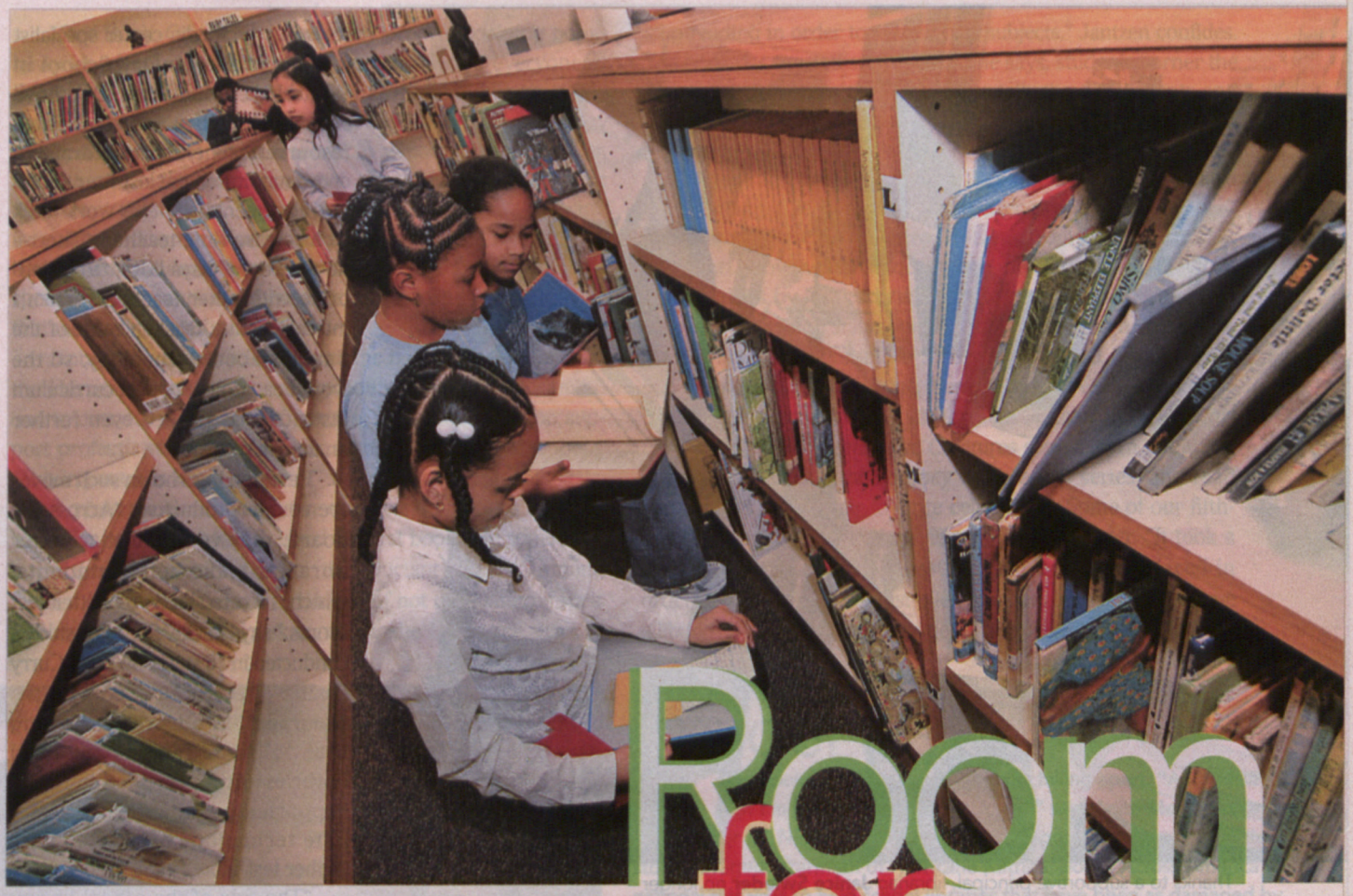


Room for Readers

With many school libraries losing ground, librarians are building new connections to literacy—and their communities.

BY SABRINA HOLCOMB

Eric is a man on a mission. "Do you have any books on 50 Cent?" the fifth-grader asks librarian Janice Swieder, his face screwed up in concentration. When she says yes, the look on his face is priceless. "Where is it?" he asks. "Over there, in biographies," she replies, pointing to a row of bookshelves. "I can get it myself?" he asks incredulously. The act of searching through a bountiful bookshelf with a dazzling range of books and actually choosing one is a big deal for Eric and his classmates. Until recently, the Bradley Elementary School library was a rolling cart Swieder pushed from class to class delivering outdated books pulled from storage boxes.

"I shared a small storage room with two reading teachers," the New Jersey librarian recalls. "I didn't have a desk, and the children weren't allowed inside to get books. The room was used as a dumping ground for supplies and equipment, so we were always climbing over odds and ends. It sounds horrible, but we made it work."

Sound more like a tale for the Brothers Grimm than 21st century nonfiction? Be that as it may, "we hear book cart and storage closet stories a lot," says Illinois librarian Linda Lucke, co-chair of NEA's Libraries, Information Literacy, and Technology Caucus. Now, thanks to the intervention of a savvy new principal and a grant from NEA's Read Across America Library Awards program, Bradley has a beautiful, fully equipped new media center for the first time in 15 years. But what about those schools without grants or "fairy godmothers"?

According to Lucke, many schools are losing their librarians just when they need them the most. Because of cutbacks and funding decisions, some districts, such as Federal Way in Kings County,

PHOTO: NORMAN Y. LONO

Thanks to a supportive principal, librarian **Janice Swieder** no longer has to cart books from storage room to classroom. She now presides over a new, fully equipped media center (shown on page 35).

Washington, have lost more than half of their credentialed librarians. A quarter of Texas schools don't have librarians, while in California, only 20 percent of schools have credentialed library media teachers, and some of those are part-time. In Indiana, a 2006 trend analysis reports that book purchases in the state have decreased by 26 percent since 2000.

Even where budgets aren't being cut, many libraries are still losing ground. With the average cost of a book up 14.4 percent in the past five years, according to a report by the *School Library Journal*, a school library with a stable budget is buying nearly 15 percent fewer books—and that's not factoring in the cost of technology. A school must buy at least one book per student per year just to maintain its collection, and two or three per student to actually grow.

While reading is fundamental and literacy a growing focus, school libraries must still compete for precious school resources—space, money, staff, even respect. "In all of NCLB, there's no mention of the role of librarians," Lucke points out. "We were ignored in the call for highly qualified teachers, yet librarianship is a master's program in most states."

Librarians are often misused or underused as book-shelvers and checkout persons rather than co-educators who partner with classroom teachers on curriculum and state standards. They're also often placed in multiple, sometimes competing, roles. As the media center specialist for Dublin Elementary School in White Lake, Minnesota, Dan Love serves as a librarian, computer resource teacher, and fundraising coordinator. For the last four years, he's also spent half of his work week as a release-time teacher. "There's no time now," says Love, "to collaborate with other teachers. When I interact with a teacher, most of the time it's about technology, so the work I can do to support curriculum instruction is pushed even further on the back burner."

Research has shown such moves are counterproductive. "Across the board, they've found that better libraries make better students, which, in turn, leads to better test scores," says Lucke. She cites studies conducted in 16 states by Keith Curry Lambs, director of research for the Colorado State Library, showing that fully staffed and stocked libraries with a certified librarian supported by an aide and up-to-date technology correlated with higher test scores at all grade levels.

"The role of the school library media program should be to support the curriculum and learning in the school," says Julie Walker, executive director of the American Association of School Libraries. "The entire school benefits," she insists, "when schools provide a library that is not just about physical access but intellectual access as well."

The library program is an integral part of the curriculum at Butterfield Elementary, Lucke's school in Libertyville, Illinois. "I'm fortunate to work in a district that values its schools and libraries," says Lucke, who works in tandem with classroom teachers to coordinate library lessons with classroom units. But even with good technology, reasonable budgets, and good staff support, the library is feeling the pinch of a budget that has not gone up in several years. "We'd like to do more but can't," says Lucke. "All schools are struggling to some extent."

In response, librarians are finding new and creative ways to reach readers—both in and outside of school. At Middle Township High School, in Cape May Court House, New Jersey, librarian Kelly Lasher has started a book club for adults at the suggestion of her vice principal. Parents, educators, and community members are invited to meet once a month in the newly renovated school library. "The principal told me in my interview that the library was a priority—a main area where people gravitated," says Lasher. "It helps that the faculty here looks at the library as a place where you can rely on things happening."

"One Book, One School," a library program gaining popularity in school districts across the country, has everyone at South Central Junior/Senior High in Elizabeth, Indiana, totally hooked. The entire school is reading *Uglies*, a futuristic trilogy by Scott Westerfeld about a world in which everyone has an operation to make them supermodel beautiful when they turn 16, except the "uglies," a group of radical teens who decide they want to keep their own faces. "We selected a book whose themes would have tie-ins across the curriculum," says media specialist Ann Jantzen, "and coordinated collaborative lessons that met Indiana state standards."

Jantzen purchased 500 copies of the book with a grant from the Harrison County Community Foundation and distributed one to every student and staff person, including education support professionals, administrators, and school board members. "The impact has been amazing," Jantzen says. "Students were coming into the library to reserve the second and third books in the series before they had finished the first book, and sometimes it was the kids I wouldn't expect, the reluctant readers." Among them: a half-dozen students in danger of not graduating. "Their teacher says they love *Uglies* so much, she has to tell them to stop reading in order to cover other subjects," Jantzen confides. The book has created such a buzz, she says, students corner the assistant principal in the cafeteria to talk about it, parents and grandparents are reading it, and when author Scott Westerfeld visited the school last fall, the kids treated him like a rock star.

The library program back at Bradley Elementary is also experiencing a renaissance, as Swieder presides over a wonderful new collection that's worlds away from her old traveling book cart. Now, when students step into the library, they can see paintings by local artists, perform plays in the puppet theater, visit a listening station with a DVD player and headphones, work with computers and a Smart Board—and wander from bookshelf to bookshelf, losing themselves in a world of books.

Bradley's students now sift through 30 titles in the *Exploring Dinosaurs and Prehistoric Creatures* series, learn about the Tuskegee airmen in the *Journey to Freedom* series, and read biographies about their favorite celebrities. "Some of our fifth-graders had never been in a library," says Swieder. "It took a long time for them to understand that books are placed in order on the shelves, not just piled in a box. Now that they have a library, they're like little sponges. They want it all now." nea

Thanks to READesign, a "Reading Garden" blooms at Cedar Hills Elementary in Jacksonville, Florida, where the fire code allows only 19 people in the library.

Reader Relief

Moldy books. Peeling paint. Libraries falling apart. "And these aren't in hurricane-ravaged schools," says Anita Merina, coordinator for NEA's Books Across America program. Launched in the storm-ravaged aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Books Across America went national this year to help school libraries that have been as damaged by budgetary and physical neglect as Gulf Coast schools were by Katrina.

In partnership with the Heart of America Foundation's (HOA) new READesign project, Books Across America is delivering not only funds and books to schools in need, but also building blocks. READesign, a "library makeover" program that refurbishes libraries, replenishes bookshelves, and revitalizes technology, was conceived when a student told HOA President Angie Halamandaries that the school library was a scary place to go. Given that the school library is the only exposure to books some children have, putting books into rooms kids don't want to visit is a serious problem, say Merina and Halamandaries.

Studies show that children living in poverty have fewer than two age-appropriate books at home—and sometimes none at all, Halamandaries adds. That's compared to 50 books for middle-income families and almost 200 for wealthier ones. To make matters worse, children in poverty also have a dearth of books when they arrive at school. While the national average estimates 18 books per student in school libraries, many schools in depressed areas have less than one book per student.

The books, resources, and funds contributed by Books Across America and its partners to bridge that vast divide make a profound difference. "When we visit schools," says Merina, "people cry and thank us for caring about their community. It's a wonderful feeling to realize the long-lasting impact we're making on future generations of readers."

Visit www.nea.org/ref?3238 for more information on NEA's Books Across America program and www.nea.org/ref?3239 to apply for a Books Across America Library Award.

PHOTO LEFT PAGE: NORMAN Y. LONO; PHOTOS THIS PAGE: COURTESY HEART OF AMERICA FOUNDATION

Podcasting the 1600s

Old world meets new when student podcasts bring the Jamestown settlement to life.

BY CINDY LONG

Amy Andrutonis sits before a microphone holding her script, pink corduroy-clad legs dangling from her chair. She idly tucks a loose strand of hair behind an ear and clears her throat as she waits for the sound engineers to digitally adjust the volume. When they're ready to record, one punches his hand into the air, lowering each finger in a silent countdown. With his closed fist as her cue, Amy, 9, begins to read a first-person narrative about Running Feet, an Indian girl from the same village as Pocahontas. "I was an Indian girl, 17. I was used to taking care of the kids while their parents were hunting...."

Yet another episode of the "Jamestown 400th Anniversary Celebration" podcast is underway at Jamestown Elementary School. Though aptly named for the project, Jamestown Elementary is actually in Arlington, Virginia, about a three-hour drive from the historic site outside Williamsburg. And though the fourth-graders are well-acquainted with 17th century America—the study of Jamestown is part of their curriculum on Virginia history and geography—these are 21st century kids from an affluent Washington, D.C., suburb where iPod headphones are practically an appendage and downloading podcasts is second nature. Their older siblings may be bigger podcast users, but plenty of programs are targeted to the lunch box and recess set—look no further than Disney's MouseTunes, Nickelodeon's *SpongeBob SquarePants* episodes, and MuggleCast and PotterCast from Harry Potter fan sites.

"Kids live with this kind of technology in their everyday lives," says Camilla Gagliolo, the instructional technology coordinator at Jamestown. "They're totally accustomed to it."

It's no surprise that students are comfortable with the technology. What may surprise you is how easy podcasting can be for teachers.

"It was so much easier than I thought it would be to incorporate podcasting into the curriculum," says Kacey Cronin, whose fourth-grade class visited Jamestown last fall, armed with digital audio recorders and cameras, iPods, video cameras, and good old-fashioned notebooks. "They were in small groups and were responsible for recording the information they thought was important to capture. The students ran with it—which is often the case these days when it comes to technology."

So What Is a Podcast, Exactly?

The *New Oxford American Dictionary* selected "podcast" as the Word of the Year for 2005, defining it as "a digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar program, made available on the Internet for downloading to a personal audio player." Despite their name, podcasts don't require iPods—they're digital audio files called MP3s that can be played on any computer or MP3 player.

Podcasts can be anything from a favorite radio program, a song, or a reading of a poem to a hobbyist offering tips, a news summary, or Amy's first-person narrative about the Indian girl named Running Feet. Updates can be automatically delivered to a computer or MP3 player by subscribing to a Web feed (For more explanations, visit "Podcasting 101" at www.nea.org/ref=?3233.)

It's easy to create and publish these recordings, according to education technology author Will Richardson. "As long as you have a way to make the recording, and as long as your students have access to the Internet, you can make this work," he writes in *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms*. Teachers can plug a microphone directly into the computer to record, or they can record directly into an MP3 player equipped with a special attach-

PARCHMENT PHOTO: ROYIK YEVGEN; IPOD: ARVIND BALARAMAN

ment. Another possibility is to purchase a handheld digital audio recorder—most cost less than $100.

Once the recordings are made, they can be edited with free applications like Audacity or Sound Studio, user-friendly programs where cutting, pasting, deleting, and rearranging is similar to text editing in Microsoft Word. You can even incorporate music and images, such as student drawings and photographs. The Jamestown podcast includes colonial music created by the fourth-graders with software called GarageBand.

On Cue with Curriculum

To align the podcasts with the curriculum, Gagliolo created handouts to help students produce their individual segments about a historical person or event from the Jamestown settlement. She told the students they could create their segments in different ways—as "an interview, a report, a poem, a word play, a skit, a 'Did You Know' segment, or any other creative way of communicating what you know and have learned."

When creating podcasts, students "become even more focused on the content," says **Camilla Gagliolo** of her fourth-graders.

Some of the fourth-grade teachers were afraid the technology might interfere with the material, but "they saw their students become even more focused on the content," says Gagliolo. "By presenting the information in different ways, and repeating what's been learned, you're setting off another set of sensory memorization."

Fourth-grade teacher Kacey Cronin admits she was worried that the technology would be distracting during the field trip. "But it helped them focus more intently because they knew they had a job to do, and they were so excited to use the equipment," she says. "Trying to help 10-year-olds understand and relate to what it was like in 1607 is not an easy task!"

Gagliolo's approach also addresses different learning styles. The podcasts involve many elements of broadcasting—writing, editing, oral presentation, and technical work. Creative writers record poetry, stories, or skits; artists provide drawings or photography; musicians produce songs; and the technicians piece it all together.

JoAnna Domson, 9, wears pink-rimmed glasses and likes creative writing. She wrote a skit about Mrs. Forrest and her maid, Anne Burras—the first women in the settlement of about 200 men. "Anne Burras is responsible for two firsts—she had the first wedding and the first baby," she says. "I wanted to do a skit because I thought it would be fun, and because they're interesting characters that aren't talked about much in books."

Once JoAnna finished writing and editing her skit, she worked with Matt Couch, one of nine fifth-graders on the podcasting technical team. The tech team produces the Jamestown historical podcast as well as the podcasts produced by other grades, such as the first-grade poetry readings and the kindergarten podcast about the class visit to the zoo. All of Jamestown's more than 500 students get a chance to record a segment. Matt, 11, records and edits using Sound Studio. "I like working on the podcasts," he says. "It can be a bore to listen to a recording for an hour, but hearing the voices can be funny. Once I heard this really mechanical sounding voice, and it turned out to be my own."

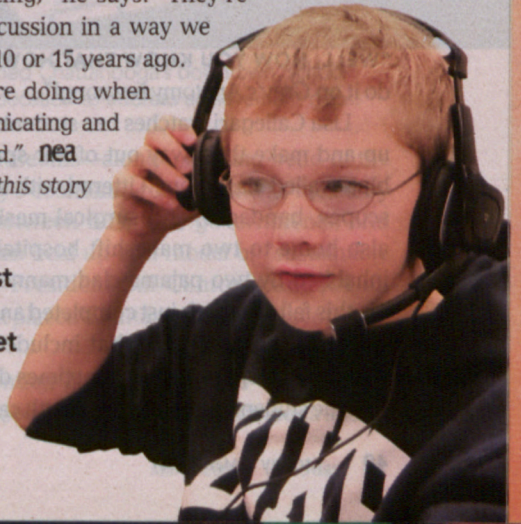
Each student seems to find a niche in the podcasting process, but they all share one motivation—having their work presented to an actual audience. The Jamestown podcast page, a link off of the school's Web site, gets as many as 400 visits a day from people around the world.

Those numbers will likely spike this spring because of attention from the other side of the pond. Fourth-graders from the British School of Washington, D.C., will contribute to the Jamestown podcast by sharing what it was like to live in England in 1607. And in May, the Jamestown Elementary chorus will have the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to sing for the Queen of England when she visits the historic site. Of course, the technical team will be on hand to record the podcast. "Their audience is unlimited," Gagliolo says.

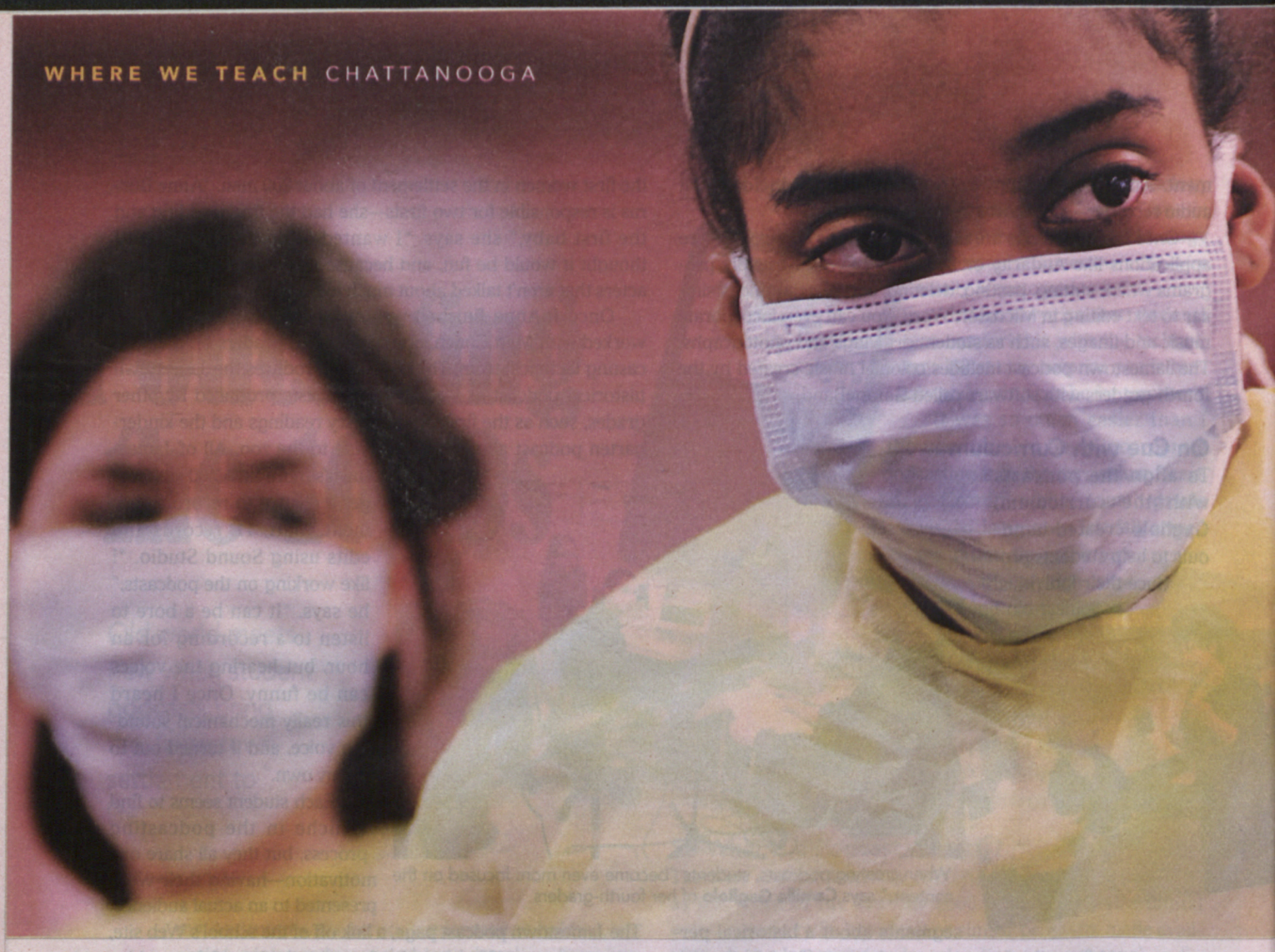
David Warlick, founder of the Education Podcast Network, agrees. "With podcasting, or blogging, or whatever the digital form, it stops being just a writing assignment and becomes a manner of communicating," he says. "They're engaged in a global discussion in a way we couldn't have imagined 10 or 15 years ago. This is what the kids are doing when they get home—communicating and interacting with the world." nea

Send comments on this story to clong@nea.org.

Listen to the Jamestown Podcast and visit Podcasting 101, a nuts and bolts overview of how to get started (or just start listening!) at www.nea.org/ref?3233.



PHOTOS: SANDY SCHAEFFER



ACADEMY REWARDS

In the 'Dynamo of Dixie,' shop class is now a thing of the past, as vocational ed retools for a changing economy.

BY TIM WALKER

"WELL, NOW YOU KNOW THAT HOW THEY do it on *Grey's Anatomy* is wrong!"

Lisa Callegari watches her students pack up and make their way out of her spacious blue-walled classroom. Littered with stethoscopes, bandages, and surgical masks, it's also home to two makeshift hospital beds inhabited by two pajama-clad mannequins. On this fall day, she's just completed an activity about scrubbing for surgical procedures that included details ABC's popular nighttime hospital drama sometimes disregards.

The students in Callegari's health careers class are enrolled in Tyner Academy's Science Academy, one of three "career academies" offered at this 1,400-student high school in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where a changing economy and more diverse student body have led to dramatic changes in the district's approach to vocational education.

The Science Academy helped Jennifer, a senior, explore her long-held dream of being a doctor. Exposed to the workings of a diverse array of health care fields and professions, Jennifer, initially interested in practicing surgery, discovered a potential stumbling block.

"I hate blood," she says. "It never bothered me on television, but trips to the hospital almost made me pass out." Now she hopes to pursue a career in physical therapy.

Downstairs in Rick Castleberry's transportation tech classroom, Brandon sits transfixed in front of one of the new computer diagnostic equipment trainer boards. "This thing can do everything but change my tires," the high school junior marvels. What it does do is help students troubleshoot automotive problems with brake systems, suspensions, and steering and engine performance. Brandon, who is enrolled in Tyner's Engineering Academy, doesn't want to be a mechanic—he plans on studying chemical engineering in college—but enjoys learning about automotive diagnostics. "I just think these are skills you need to learn in life," he says.

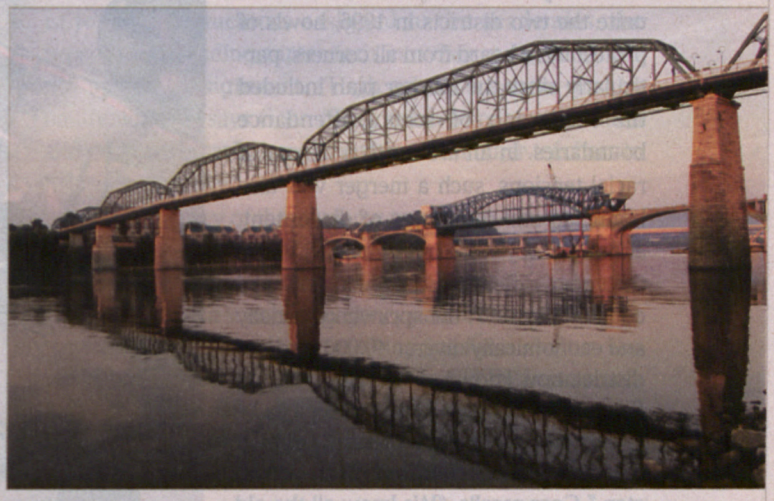
Students making "real world" connections to their coursework are a common sight at Tyner. "[They] know what they learn here is relevant to their lives—without their teachers having to spell it out," says Tyner Academy Principal Carol Goss. "They graduate from school with a vision of what they want to do in life."

Twelve of the 17 high schools in Hamilton County, which includes the city of Chattanooga and outlying areas, are now home to one or more career academies, learning centers that have redefined and modernized career and technical education. Like elsewhere, vocational education had long been a haven for academic underachievers, separated from the rest of the student body. Since they began launching six years ago, these academies have turned the outdated models upside down by blending career education with a more rigorous academic menu. Doing so has helped address the district's achievement gaps. Hamilton County officials are encouraged by significant increases in graduation rates and scores on state English tests, which a greater percentage of students are passing at an advanced—not merely proficient—level.

The blueprint for these academies was designed by district officials, teachers, and business and community leaders, with the area's changing economy in mind. "Chattanooga lost its manufacturing base to the point where less than 20 percent of the jobs here were in that sector," explains Bill Kennedy of the Public Education Foundation, a local education foundation that's partnered with the district on the $14 million program. "[It's] a different town from the one their parents and grandparents knew. Our high schools—particularly our vocational ed classes—were still preparing our students for jobs that no longer existed. That had to change."

Chattanooga was once heralded as the "Dynamo of Dixie"—not bad for a city that is only the fourth largest (population: 155,000) in Tennessee. From the 1930s through the 1960s, it was a thriving industrial center, motored by foundries, tanneries, brick kilns, and textile mills. Chattanooga's luster started to erode in the 1970s, as the city's manufacturing base began to shrink. As heavy industry fell on hard times, plants closed, leaving behind a reeling economy and a stockpile of abandoned, polluted sites. A 1970 national air quality survey by the U.S. Department of Health, Welfare, and Education pinpointed Chattanooga as the "most polluted city in America." The city was also besieged by problems shared by many urban areas: rising crime rates, declining school quality, racial conflicts, and "White flight" to the suburbs. The "Dynamo of Dixie" had become just another American city in decay.

Today, it's hard to find signs of this recent history in the clear views of Lookout Mountain and the surrounding ridges, or the bustling, picturesque waterfront—home to new condominiums, restaurants, and museums—along a looping bend of the Tennessee River. The city's economic comeback was fueled by creative partnerships between business, governments, and civic leaders and has been held up as a model of "sustainable development." In 1996, President Bill Clinton's Council on Sustainable Development placed Chattanooga on its list of case-study communities.



As urban renewal transformed Chattanooga's downtown, school officials reworked career education to address achievement gaps.

But the national attention given to the city's "green" economic revival was soon overshadowed by Chattanooga's less-

PHOTOS: DAVID HUMBER

illustrious status as home to some of the worst-performing schools in the state. City leaders, local foundations, and district officials set their sights on duplicating the collaboration that characterized the city's model of economic renovation.

Propelling the district toward reform was the contentious 1997 merger of two neighboring school districts: the largely Black, lower-income Chattanooga City Schools and the predominantly White, suburban Hamilton County district. When city and county leaders voted to unite the two districts in 1996, howls of protest were heard from all corners, particularly since the merger plan included the redrawing of school attendance boundaries. In an area with a history of racial tensions, such a merger was also bound to stir rumblings of discontent, although they were often masked under the veil of differences between "city and country." In 1997, the sprawling, racially and economically diverse 40,000 student-district, now known as Hamilton County Schools, was born.

"For the suburban folks in Hamilton County, the baby was left on the doorstep," Goss recalls. "We knew all the old tensions were still there. But we also were confident that if educators and administrators from both districts focused on student achievement and instruction, the merger could benefit us all."

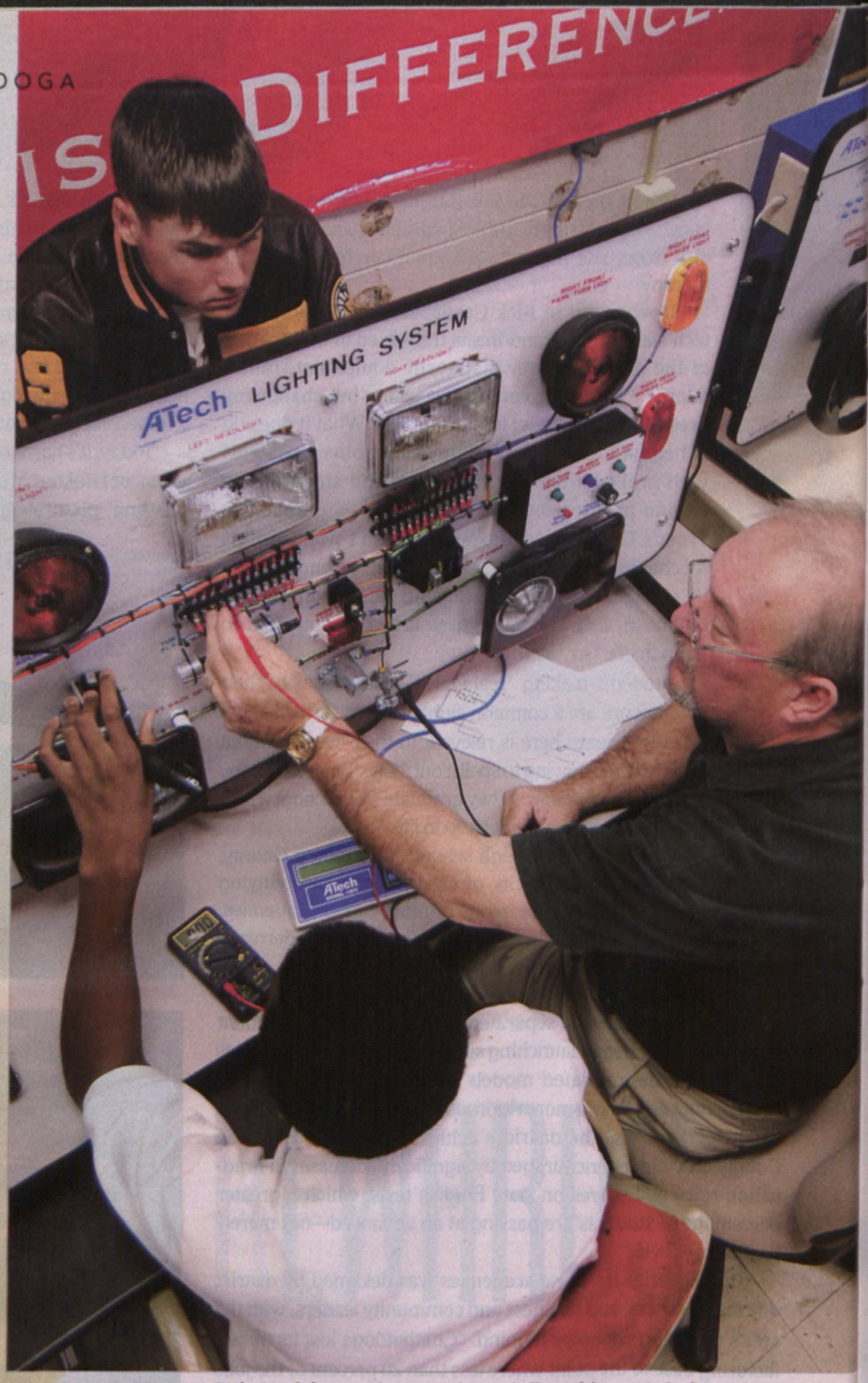
Following the merger, Hamilton County steadily lost students to local parochial and private schools and to the surrounding suburbs. Central to plans to overhaul the county's high schools was ending, or at least reducing, the academic and geographic isolation of minority students. Then-school superintendent Jesse Register mapped out an ambitious plan to create magnet schools—in the form of career academies—that would attract White and Black students across the traditional boundaries.

The district joined forces with Chattanooga's Public Education Foundation (PEF) to help coordinate plans to bolster student achievement. In its role as a "critical friend" to the district, PEF was crucial in providing data analysis and the resources necessary to line up grants to finance the district's initiatives. Chattanooga is home to a community of strong foundations, including the Benwood Foundation, which, in 2001, made its largest grant ever—$5 million—to help overhaul nine of the lowest-performing elementary schools in Chattanooga.

Hamilton County's burgeoning reform efforts also attracted outside interest. In 2004, the NEA Foundation awarded Hamilton County $2.5 million over five years to help close the achievement gaps between lower-income and more affluent students in the district's middle schools; the Foundation later awarded similar grants to Milwaukee and Seattle.

PEF and Hamilton County also secured an $8 million Schools for a New Society grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the largest private grant in the history of Chattanooga's schools. Then PEF raised an additional $6 million, for a total of $14 million dedicated to reinvigorating the district's high schools.

The high school reform initiative was ambitious: establish a



Rick Castleberry (above) and **Lisa Callegari** (opposite) of Tyner Academy collaborate with other teachers on blending core subjects with career and technical education.

more challenging and relevant curriculum and tailor it to the new socioeconomic diversity of the district and the new economic climate. Flush with grant money, Hamilton County high schools would begin launching small "learning communities" organized as academies with career focuses that included health sciences, engineering, construction, communications, and technology. Educators would also collaborate with members of the local business community to embed career-based lesson plans into the curriculum.

For veteran career tech teachers like Rick Castleberry, the academies have transformed classrooms that once lacked a strong academic focus into exciting and rigorous learning centers.

"Once, 'shop' was 'shop.' And 'auto' was 'auto.' They had no connections to academics," says Castleberry, who has taught transportation technology for 30 years. "Teaching that used to be about simple diagnostics now incorporates electronics, math, and science into a more comprehensive package."

Castleberry also marvels at the disparate group of students now attending his classes, a change driven in large part by the district's adoption of a single-track curriculum. In its consultations with local colleges, business leaders, and researchers, PEF and district officials were hearing the same refrain: students need a core set of skills—academic and technical—to succeed after graduation. All students are now required to complete a course of study that includes mathematics, science, foreign language, fine arts, and other core subjects. By doing so, district officials aim to better prepare students for college, an apprenticeship, or the workforce, narrow the achievement gaps between college-bound and vocational students, and provide equal access to high-level courses.

"I get all kinds of students in my classes: the troublemakers, special ed kids, and class valedictorians," Castleberry says. "It never used to be that way."

But for many educators assigned to the academies, the prospect of blending career tech into their curriculum was not an easy assignment. "High school teachers are, by nature, loners," says Goss. "They teach in relative isolation and don't necessarily have to interact with other teachers to do their job effectively."

And that's the key of the academy approach. A recent highlight for Lisa Callegari, Tyner's health teacher, was a schoolwide project in which students from all of the school's academies teamed up to design a school emergency preparedness plan. The Engineering Academy created a blueprint for a shelter, the Communication Academy produced videos and DVDs on emergency preparedness, and all students used math skills to create budgets for health supplies and writing skills to write correspondence to area institutions, including hospitals and law enforcement.

Hamilton County had its share of teachers who were quite comfortable staying in their groove. Denise Hearn has taught English and social studies for 25 years at East Ridge High School, which became home to Hamilton County's first career academy, with a focus on construction. With a little prodding from her principal, Hearn reluctantly accepted the assignment to teach in the new academy.

"I was terrified," she recalls. "I'm a traditionalist—I'll lecture your ears off if you give me half the chance! At the same time, I did suspect that my teaching probably needed to be re-energized."

Teaching literature had to make room for more technical instruction that will assist students in the workplace, including writing memos and sharpening interview skills. Though she wishes students were as passionate about literature as she was when she was a student, Hearn has been invigorated by her students' heightened interest and participation.

There's still room for the classics, but Hearn has repurposed her instruction to elicit more discussion from students. When she teaches *The Crucible*, for example, instead of discussing the historical connections of Arthur Miller's play, she has students talk about the role of authority and its potential for injustice in their own lives.

"The academies, by making the classes more directly relevant to students' interests and aspirations, give them more control over the learning environment," Hearn says. "We've given them a sense of ownership over their own education." nea

Send comments on this story to twalker@nea.org.

What Teachers Want

In North Carolina and a growing number of states, improving working conditions has become a science.

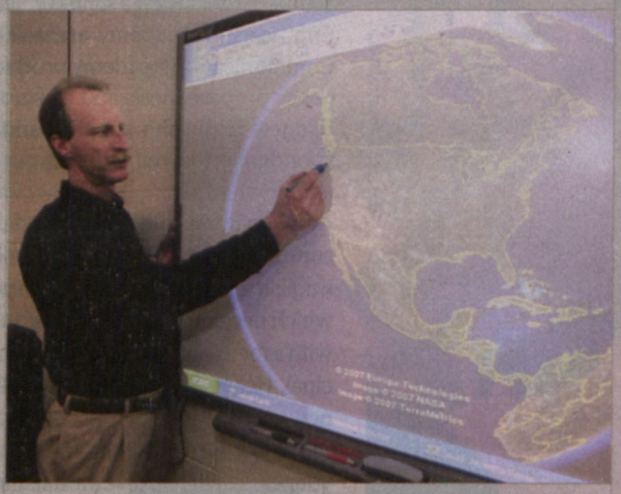
When invited to "please take our survey," most people take a pass. But not the teachers at Broad Creek Middle School in Newport, North Carolina. They eagerly participated in the state's 2006 Teacher Working Conditions Survey—and with good reason.

Two years before, Broad Creek teachers had said in a survey that their top priority was faster integration of technology in their classrooms. The school's improvement team acted quickly to supply laptops and Smart Boards to more teachers and upgrade the school's information systems.

"We had total buy-in [for the 2006 survey] because our teachers knew we would use the data," says Broad Creek Principal Cathy Tonon.

Buy-in has been a critical factor in the Teacher Working Conditions (TWC) program, which is now spreading from North Carolina to other states with financial support from NEA. Recognizing that student achievement depends on improved working conditions for educators, North Carolina Gov. Mike Easley implemented the first-of-its-kind biennial statewide survey in 2002. At the suggestion of his teacher advisor, Ann McArthur, Easley approved a 39-question, pencil-and-paper survey. Some 42,000 educators volunteered to fill out the questionnaire, which focused on five issues critical to teacher working conditions: planning time, teacher empowerment, facilities and resources, quality of school leadership, and professional development. With input from NEA researchers and its state affiliate, the North Carolina Association of Educators, the survey was refined and conducted online two years later, identifying both local issues and statewide concerns.

"My specific working condition issues may be different from someone else's in a different school," explains Bill Ferriter, a teacher at Salem Middle School. "But there are definite common perceptions that you heard across the state." Lack of preparation time and decision-making authority were commonly cited roadblocks in the 2004 survey, which also confirmed the connection between working conditions, student performance, and teacher retention. The results led to policy changes in areas ranging from planning time to increased educator voice in school improvement teams such as the one at Broad Creek.



After citing technology as a priority in a Teacher Working Conditions Survey, teachers at **David Holland's** school now benefit from Smart Boards, laptops, and upgraded information systems.

The TWC survey also singled out schools with excellent environments, including Broad Creek in 2004, when the school garnered one of North Carolina's "Real D.E.A.L." awards, given to schools with "Dedicated Educators, Administrators, and Learners."

David Holland, who has taught sixth grade at Broad Creek for 8 of his 17 years as an educator, says his school fosters a culture of support and collaboration. Peer observation, in particular, is encouraged, as teachers at Broad Creek often visit their colleagues' classrooms and compare different teaching styles. "Teachers here have the freedom to teach," he explains. "We are allowed to take ownership of our classrooms."

Holland echoes the TWC's finding that quality working conditions make a difference for students as well as teachers. "Sixth grade is a transitional year and can be quite difficult for students," he says. "But parents come up to me all the time and say how surprised they were that their kids had an easier time than expected."

Gov. Easley, meanwhile, had been talking up the TWC survey at meetings of the National Governors Association, says McArthur. Statewide teacher surveys have now been conducted in South Carolina and Kansas, while pilot surveys have been conducted in several districts in Arizona, Nevada, Ohio, and Virginia. A January TWC conference cosponsored by NEA attracted educators, administrators, lawmakers, and state affiliate members from 14 states.

"It's exciting for teachers," Ferriter says, "to realize that lawmakers in the governor's office, state legislatures and school boards are using these surveys to really listen to educators. Teachers have to raise their voices and seize this opportunity."

—TIM WALKER

For more details on TWC, visit **www.nea.org/ref?3237**.

PHOTO: RANDY DAVEY

Is your student the next Picasso?

Help commemorate NEA's 150th birthday with student art that celebrates you!

NEA's National Kids' Art Contest

Enter your students' art and win fame and fortune for your school and students. Winning artwork will be displayed on www.nea.org and in *NEA Today* magazine.

Artwork can be based on one of three themes—

What's Cool About School
My Favorite Teacher
School of the Future

Contest Guidelines: The contest is open to K-12 students of NEA members. Artwork must be submitted by a member and must be original two-dimensional media—drawing, painting, print, photograph, mixed, or digital.

Submission Deadline: April 2, 2007

Honors and Prizes: Prizes will be awarded in four grade categories—K-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12—with a grand prize winner selected from all winning entries.

One Grand Prize for Best Across All Categories
$1,500 for K-12 student; $1,500 for student's educator; $1,500 for school

First Prize
$150 in each of four categories: K-3 student; 4-6 student; 7-9 student; 10-12 student

Second Prize
$100 in each of four categories: K-3 student; 4-6 student; 7-9 student; 10-12 student

Submitted art will not be returned. Participants assign all copyright in and to the work to NEA. Winners will be responsible for any taxes on prizes.

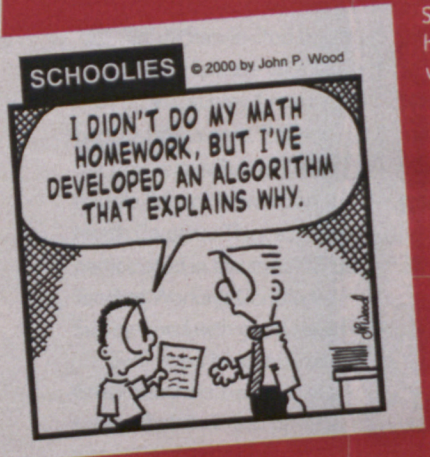
For complete contest rules, entry and release forms, and submission information, go to **www.nea.org/ref?3277**

Top Homework Tips

On the P.A.T.H.

I use a system I call P.A.T.H. (Positive Attitude Toward Homework). Last year, about half of my students did not turn in their homework. I got all kinds of reasons, including lack of understanding regarding what to do and how to do it. This year I decided to give out my home number so my students could call me on a limited basis (three days a week between 7 and 8 p.m.) and ask homework questions. This takes some of the burden off parents who may have limited knowledge or are working at that time. Since I started P.A.T.H., I have a 90 percent homework return rate.

FAYE SMITH
Fourth-grade teacher
Augusta, Georgia



Family Fun

I help parents connect with their child's school experience by sending home weekly parental-involvement homework. Each Wednesday night, the only homework is a short activity that involves others at home—a family graph, a short interview with an adult on his or her experience with a certain math or science concept, a math-partner game, etc. The parent or guardian must sign the paper or the child's assignment log when the activity is completed.

JANET SHLEGLE
Special education teacher
Loveville, Maryland

Free Quiz

I use a lottery to reward homework completion. All my students write their names on slips of paper. Whenever there is a quiz, I check back over the past five days, and those students who have completed all the assignments in that time get their names put in the lottery. As the students wait for the quiz, I dramatically select a name and that student doesn't have to take the quiz. Homework completion has shot up in all my classes and so have grades.

LINDA SCHILZ
High school
Spanish teacher
Madison, Wisconsin

COOL IDEA

Something Old, Something New

My eighth-grade general music classes spend four weeks in a virtual time machine visiting The Beatles experience 1962–69. From Love Me Do to the Abbey Road Song Cycle, my students dive into reading materials, video clips, Microsoft PowerPoint listening logs, and live performances featuring the music of the Fab Four.

My goal was to cover our state goals in a more contemporary way and, more importantly, introduce my students to new music up and down the radio dial.

I use current events such as the recent legal case between The Beatles' Apple Records and Apple Computer, Cirque du Soleil's new Beatles "LOVE" production in Las Vegas, video clips from the Austin Powers-esque "Help!" film, and even a hilarious interview between Chris Farley and Paul McCartney from *Saturday Night Live* to make the transition much more enjoyable. And we have recently found the Internet to be another cool resource as we browse YouTube to discover how computer-users are interpreting or parodying Beatles music. The result is kids who are plugged in and hooked!

One of the most fascinating projects to the kids is uncovering clues concerning the "Paul Is Dead" hoax. They particularly enjoy dissecting the Sgt. Pepper album cover, and my most recent students decided to recreate the cover using pop icons and photos of themselves to depict the 87 cardboard cutouts in the background.

I am so thrilled to receive phone calls or see parents in the office who stop me to ask what I'm

Ross Gentry's music students could study The Beatles eight days a week. They've even made a modern-day parody of the famous Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band album cover.

CARTOON: JOHN WOOD; LOTTERY BALL CAGE: NOLIE; STUDENT AND TEACHER PHOTOS: COURTESY OF ROSS GENTRY

doing in class, because all of a sudden their kids are listening to music that the family can talk about together. Their favorite songs might surprise you. In an age of rap music, students are suddenly requesting: "Help!" "Eleanor Rigby," "Strawberry Fields," "Yesterday," "Rocky Raccoon," and "Let It Be."

ROSS GENTRY
Music teacher
Glendale Heights, Illinois

SECOND WIND

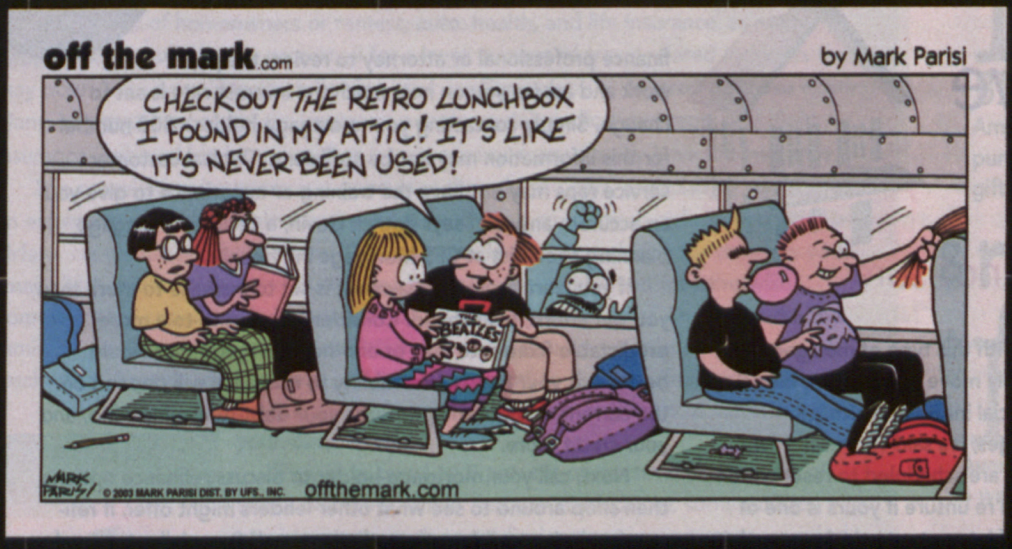
What's your secret for maintaining momentum during the second half of the school year?

ANSWER: We maintain, even increase, momentum during the rest of the school year by working on a dynamite motivational activity—a third-grade musical we present in June and work on after our March NCLB testing. The musical is based on curriculum content, and we mostly work on it at recess so little academic time is lost. Everyone in the third grade has a special part in this production, which unifies and motivates teachers, students, staff, and the community. During the show's production, students see adults problem-solve as a team, work together to achieve a successful result, and enjoy the fulfillment of a job well done. The entire school looks forward to our musical, and the children who leave our grade level remember their show and their tunes as the highlight of their time in elementary school. There is no business like show business, and yes, it is a lot of work, but it keeps us revved up and going!

MARILYN GRABER
Third-grade teacher
Montgomery County, Maryland

ANSWER: I save my favorite topics for last! My students end the year with life science, genetics, and space. These subjects involve working outside, using microscopes, building space stations, and working with rockets. If I hold the things I enjoy until the second half of the year, it comes through to my students!

AMY KELLER
Fifth/Sixth-grade science teacher
Quinter, Kansas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by Mark Parisi
CHECK OUT THE RETRO LUNCHBOX I FOUND IN MY ATTIC! IT'S LIKE IT'S NEVER BEEN USED!
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Is your student our grand prize winner?

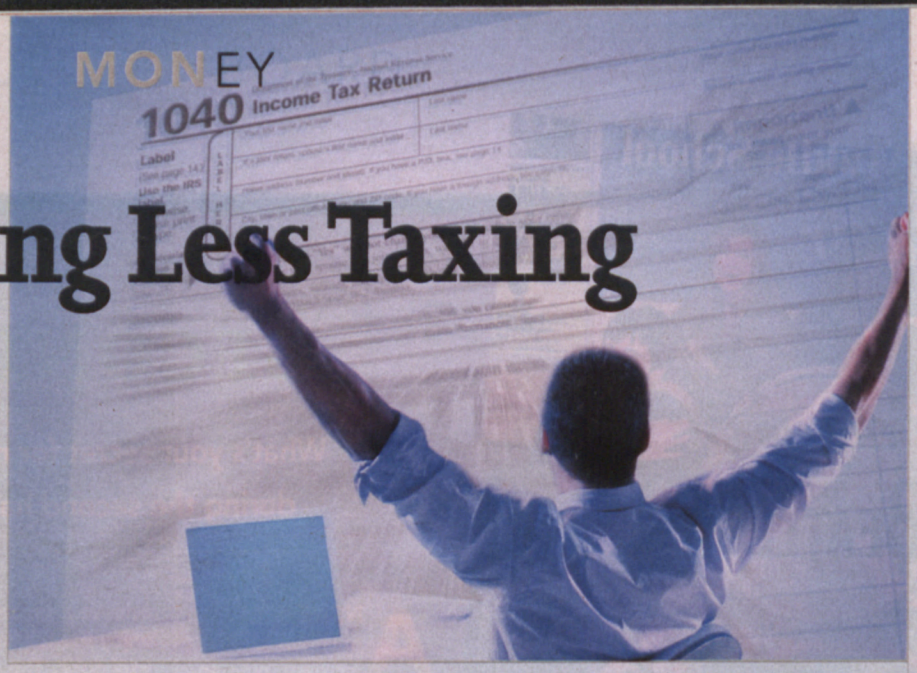
Enter your students' artwork in NEA's national Kids' Art Contest **(see page 45 for details).**

Correction: The answer key for the February **math whiz** exercise "Calculating Valentines" should be N x (N–1)/2.

WHAT MAKES YOU SMILE?

Send a fun story to Sabrina Holcomb, **sholcomb@nea.org.**

CARTOON: MARK PARISI; CURTAINS: SEBASTIAN KAULITZKI; MICROSCOPE: HOMESTUDIO; BANANA: JULIEN TROMEUR



Make Filing Less Taxing

It's that time of year, and we've got tips to keep you and the tax man on good terms.

BY DEBORAH A. WILBURN

If your tax return is pretty simple (no home business, for example), you can probably save a few bucks by doing your taxes on your computer, rather than heading to an accountant. But these days, when stolen data and compromised computer systems make headlines all too frequently, you may be concerned about how safe it is to file returns over the Internet. You needn't worry, according to tax experts who have been doing it themselves for several years. And to sweeten the deal, sending an e-return means cutting the wait for a refund to about 7 to 10 days.

If you think you're ready to file electronically, there are two ways to go about it: Buy the software from a store or download it from the company's Web site (for a fee), complete your return, and then send an e-file to the IRS; or create an account with a company's Web site, complete your return online, and then send it electronically to the IRS. Many companies offer both options. "The main difference is that if you buy the software, you can use it to do lots of returns," notes Eva Rosenberg, whose Web site, taxmama.com, features the latest in tax information. "You could do yours, your child's, your best friend's." You may also want to purchase the software if you have a slow Internet connection. At this time of year, many retailers offer rebates on tax preparation software.

When filing online, just make sure the URL of the company changes from "http" to "https" once you click that you're ready to buy the program. That indicates a secure connection. Rosenberg recommends that consumers stick with brand-name companies as an added precaution.

Many educators can prepare a federal return online and file it without incurring any fees. Free File, a partnership between the IRS and the Free File Alliance coalition, lets qualifying taxpayers—including active duty military and taxpayers who earn $52,000 or less—complete their returns online free of charge. To find out if you qualify, go to www.irs.gov and type "free file" into the search box.

Rosenberg points out that when filing online, you may be asked if you want a Refund Anticipation Loan if you're due a refund. She and other experts say it's best to avoid such loans because the banks that provide them charge high interest rates, and your refund should reach you within a couple of weeks anyway.

www.neamb.com

Do you have an ARM?

Read this if you're not sure.

That's adjustable rate mortgage. With this type of mortgage, the interest rate you pay can periodically move up or down, based on your loan agreement and the financial index to which it's attached. When an ARM rate changes, it's said to "reset." Two trillion dollars' worth of mortgages are scheduled to reset nationally over the next 24 months. If you're unsure if yours is one of them, now is the time to find out. If interest rates inch upward, it could mean a substantial hike in your mortgage payment. Here are some steps to make sure you're not caught short:

First, check the terms of your mortgage. If it's an ARM, ask a finance professional or attorney to review the paperwork and advise you on how much the interest rate is set to change. Simply contacting your mortgage-holder's 800 number for this information may not be sufficient. "Typical customer service reps may not have the training or experience to give you an accurate answer," says Patrick Gavin, a certified mortgage planning specialist at CFS Mortgage in Phoenix.

If you learn that your payment is set to increase to more than you can afford, plan ahead. Consider refinancing to a more predictable fixed-rate loan or another mortgage that would better suit your needs. Your ability to refinance will depend on the current value of the property, your debt-to-income ratio, and your credit score.

Next, call your mortgage-holder to discuss refinance options, then shop around to see what other lenders might offer. If refinancing isn't possible and you find yourself financially strapped, consider contacting a nonprofit Consumer Credit Counseling Service for assistance. Go to www.debtadvice.org to find a reputable agency.

PHOTO TOP: COMSTOCK; BOTTOM: STOCKDISC

Learning More About Money Just Got Easier

If you resolved to get more financially savvy in 2007 but now find yourself foundering, help is on the way. This month, NEA Member Benefits launches a series of free, online mini-classes about financial education. Topics will include setting goals, budgeting, debt management, retirement, saving, and insurance. Called Investing in Your Future, this new education program is available for NEA members and their families thanks to a partnership with national non-profit group BetterInvesting. "Given the current climate surrounding Social Security and both private and public pension plans, such education programs are even more critical for our members," says NEA President Reg Weaver.

Beginning in March, members can access the classes online, at www.neamb.com/investinginyou, or call (800) 637-4636 for more information. The program, funded by a grant from the NASD Investor Education Foundation, will also provide classes on stock and mutual fund investing, including diversification, asset allocation, and risks and rewards. All topics are geared to help members feel more confident about managing their own investments, such as 403(b) plans. The program even includes a game that lets players create and manage a stock portfolio—without, of course, the risk of losing any real money. Teachers and education support professionals can use the site to learn more about what it takes to secure their financial future. Log onto www.neamb.com and check it out today.

How I Saved a Buck!

Glenda Willingham, Memphis, Tennessee, elementary school teacher

"Stay out of the stores. Read a book, clean your refrigerator, go for a drive, etc. Shopping for the sake of shopping always costs me money."

Got a great way to save some cash? E-mail the Money editor at ckopkowski@nea.org. Also, head to www.neatoday.org for more money-saving tips from your colleagues.

Is It Worth It? Travel Insurance

With so many things that can potentially go wrong when taking off for some valuable R&R, consumers are increasingly looking to travel insurance to provide a cushion of financial and emotional security. But are all of the protections available really necessary? Not according to Madelyn Flannagan of the Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers in America. "If you have standard levels of homeowners or renters, auto, health, and life insurance, as many people do, you are already protected for a large number of travel-related incidents that may occur," she says. Skip the following after confirming you're covered on those existing plans: baggage loss, rental car insurance, supplemental medical coverage, and flight insurance (onboard life insurance that is unnecessary if you already have life insurance.)

Trip cancellation insurance is a good idea though, she says, especially if you've got an expensive, nonrefundable travel package such as a cruise or all-inclusive vacation with airfare, car rental, and hotel room. This insurance is also a good idea for travelers with small children or elderly parents. You can expect to be reimbursed for otherwise nonrefundable expenses if you need to cancel your trip because of illness, death, or a family or weather emergency. Cancellation insurance also covers rebooking fees if you reschedule. As with any insurance policy, it's important to read the fine print and learn what is and isn't covered (like acts or threats of terrorism at your destination.)

Expect to pay 4 to 8 percent of the total trip cost for all family members. While that can seem pricey, some policies provide extras, such as medical evacuation insurance—a good idea if you're staying in a remote area. Comparison shop for the best deal and coverage. But don't dally. Trip insurance typically needs to be purchased within 10 days of booking your getaway.

I Spent How Much?!

A look at the big and small ways the country spends its money.

Wedding gifts

$19 BILLION

Amount spent annually making purchases from wedding gift registries.

$70–$100

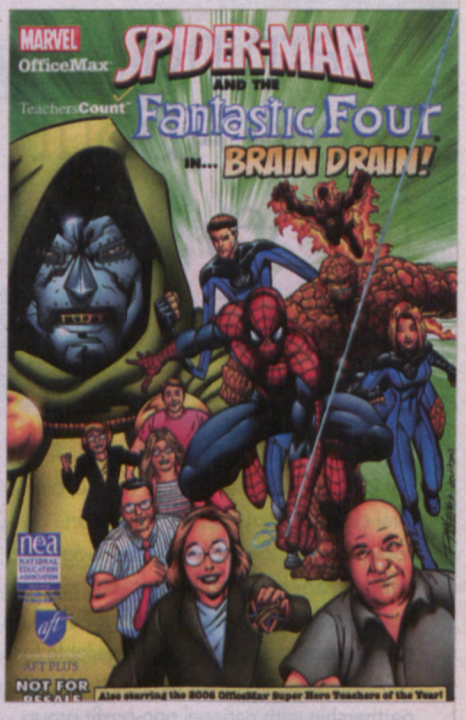
Average amount spent on a wedding gift.

SOURCE: ABOUT.COM

PHOTO TOP: NICK WHITE; RIGHT: MARTIN POOLE; ABOVE: XIMAGINATION

Comic Relief

Several NEA members are finding themselves in unique new roles: superhero and comic strip star.



FOR A GROUP OF DEDICATED, serious professionals, there's an awful lot of funny business going on with NEA members around the country lately. Sixth-grade Cherry Hill, New Jersey, science teacher Hermann Hoffmann is hanging out with the Thing and Spiderman on the cover of Marvel Comics' "Brain Drain!" special edition. *The Oregonian*'s new comic strip *Adams' Apples* is penned by art and music specialist Jim Adams. And in Minnesota, the creator of the *Schoolies* and *Mr. Woodhead* comic strips is a social studies specialist.

Hermann Hoffman found his way into the ink after a student nominated him for "Superhero Teacher of the Year." Rachel Benigno's essay about Hoffmann's classroom dedication and his work with the environment club and girls basketball team at Beck Middle School beat out 4,000 other entries in the Teachers Count/Office Max competition. Four other NEA members were finalists for superhero status: Mario Guerrero, Kathryn Pariseau, and Tony Pavlovich of California, and Karen Yingling of Ohio. In the comic, they battle Dr. Doom as he and his Doombots try to sap students' minds. (To read the comic online, see www.nea.org/ref?3236.)

"As an elementary school student I liked to read Batman and Superman and classic comic books," says Hoffmann. "It's just amazing to look and see that you're on the cover of a Marvel comic book." He says the likeness—created from photos he submitted after winning—is good. "Everybody who sees it says 'That's Mr. Hoffmann,'" he says. Now former students, fellow teachers, and family members from as far away as Germany congratulate Hoffmann on his superhero debut. "[They are] telling me it's really neat to see teachers put in such a good light," he says.

Clockwise from upper left: **Hermann Hoffmann;** Schoolies creator **John Woods;** and *Adams' Apples* creator **Jim Adams,** whose strip is below.

It's a similar, but funnier, spin that Jim Adams puts on the school, students, teachers, and support professionals who appear in his *Adams' Apples* comic strip. "Like most teachers, I found frustrations in the job and I had to put them somewhere," he says. "It's therapy." Finding material is easy. "It's like picking fruit every time I walk into the classroom." Many of his strips are inspired by exchanges with the 400 or so students he sees weekly in his art and music classes at Marshall Elementary in Vancouver, Washington.

Like Hoffmann, Adams made it into print as the result of a contest. At the urging of his father, when *The Oregonian* asked for new comic submissions, Adams sent in the handful of strips he'd drawn. Until then, his only audience had been his peers in the staff lounge. When the newspaper's editors asked readers to vote for comic strips to be added to the paper, 25 percent of the vote went to *Adams' Apples*—enough to vault it into second place, behind a formidable opponent: classic *Peanuts* strips.

In his classroom, Adams has students create their own cartoons. The public success of *Adams' Apples* has been a boost, and he hopes to see the strip syndicated in the upcoming year.

Seeing much of their own careers is what resonates with readers of John Woods' comic strips *Schoolies* and *Mr. Woodhead* and his monthly humor newsletter *Learning Laffs*. A recent issue of the newsletter—which chronicles the fictional Fuddle River School District—featured a list of approved esoteric educational jargon, including "assessmentalizing" and "whatsoeverables" and such banned terms as "learning" and "teaching."

"Most of the humor is for teachers," he says, "not for students or for parents." Woods—a social studies curriculum specialist in Minneapolis—refers to the comic strips as therapy. "Humor is so important, especially when you're doing work that's really important," he says. "You have to find things to laugh at. You have to find the silliness, just for mental health."

—NATALIE McGILL

WELCOME TO ANGELO'S. RIGHT THIS WAY, SIR.
Please WAIT TO BE SEATED
HOW'S THIS? UM, SIR?
IS THERE A PROBLEM?
SORRY... JUST A HABIT.
I'M A SCHOOL TEACHER. I NEVER SIT IN A CHAIR 'TIL I'VE EXAMINED IT CLOSELY.

ILLUSTRATION TOP: MARVEL/TEACHERS COUNT; PHOTOS CENTER: CONTRIBUTED; CARTOON BOTTOM: JIM ADAMS

Should we abolish homework?

YES

If students are in school seven hours a day, what right do I have to interfere with their family time? One of my fellow teachers had a son in middle school who would come home from basketball practice, then go to the basement to do, on average, three hours of homework a night. Does this sound healthy?

At the younger grades, it is almost criminal to assign homework. I spoke to a mother of a first-grader who was getting 30 minutes a night. She is very frustrated that instead of quality time with her son, she has to go through homework that at times is frustrating for him.

In my own classroom, I have actually noticed an increase in achievement, thanks to my reduction in homework. I used to assign a big project at the end of a novel or unit, and then give students a week or so to do it on their own. Later, I tried giving students time in class to work on these projects. Two positive things happened as a result: a higher percentage of students turned in a project, and there was an increase in the quality of the projects.

Educators have about seven hours a day to create meaningful learning experiences. If they cannot, then they are not using time efficiently. Children are not machines. They need "down time" just like any adult.

MIKE BURMAN teaches high school English and journalism at Horace Mann High School in North Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

NO

Abolishing homework will negatively impact students' learning in no small measure. First, it would be detrimental to continuity. Homework allows students to practice the skills they learned earlier in the day, so that when they return to school the next day, those skills aren't lost. I don't know of many students who willingly study the next chapter without being asked. There are exceptions, but most students do not study on their own. They need direction; homework is just one tool to keep them on track.

Also, when students have assignments that are to be completed at home, it often encourages parents to become more involved with their children's education. When reviewing homework assignments, parents are able to see firsthand what their children are learning in school, which fosters communication between teachers and parents. This has been an invaluable tool in my classroom to foster the home/school relationship.

Teachers should not relent in using homework to enhance students' performance, but it should not be assigned to the extent that students become inundated or overwhelmed, and it should never be assigned as punishment.

Although homework is an essential ingredient to a quality education, breaks from homework can certainly be given from time to time—students sometimes need breaks just as we need breaks from our work.

HENRY ADEOYE is a special education teacher at Moorhead Junior High School in Conroe, Texas.

OTHER VOICES

Here's what other educators are saying on our message boards. Join the debate by visiting www.nea.org/forum.

CLASSROOM TIME should be spent on activities that require interaction. Any practice that can be done independently should be assigned as homework.
CAROL SANDERS, Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa High School, Belgrade, Minnesota

I HAVE TAUGHT FOR over 20 years and have not given homework for nearly half that time. [I assign] "voluntary" homework [for test preparation]. Less work for me in grading papers but just as much learning for them, as their emphasis is quality not quantity. Graded homework should be abolished as unfair to most. It is not possible to know who did the homework. The availability of help at home is not equal [for all students]. The after-school commitments are not equal. Use school time for school and home time for home.
JIM LUDWIG, Bradley Central High School, Cleveland, Tennessee

THE STUDENTS PLANNING to begin their working career right after high school are less likely to be involved in jobs that will require much in the way of "homework"-type training for their employment, but the self-discipline developed by good study habits pays off on the job, as well. A strong work ethic in homework transfers to a strong work ethic in employment.
THOMAS BARIBEAU, Marinette High School, Marinette, Wisconsin

EDUCATORS FORUM

Who was your favorite teacher when you were in school? If your students knew you when you were their age, what would most surprise them? Share your thoughts on our Forums page—www.nea.org/forum—or e-mail your story to clong@nea.org.

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Representantes que hablan español están disponibles a pedido.

WSNT0307

resources

53 **Grants & Awards** Young heroes shine in the spotlight with the Gloria Barron Prize.
54 **Minority Leadership Training Seminars** Train for a leadership role in your Association.
55 **Take Note** Follow an exciting polar dogsled expedition online.
56 **Books by NEA Members** A librarian's love for demolition derby yields a surprising work.
56 **In Print** A plucky little girl becomes a leader for women in the Wyoming Territory.
59 **Heads Up from NEA Member Benefits** Take advantage of free online financial planning and investing seminars.
61 **Diversity Calendar** March is Women's History Month—check out our Web links.
62 **On the Web** A site for trailblazing students who are the first in their families to attend college.
62 **On TV** Did you know that windshield wipers were invented by a woman? Find out about women inventors and their struggle to protect their intellectual property.

Have a Yen To Travel?

If you are a middle or high school teacher with five or more years of classroom experience in English as a Foreign Language and social sciences (including social studies, civics, and history), you can apply for an International Travel Grant from the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), a non-profit organization that provides leadership programs to improve the quality of education worldwide.

Thirty-six applicants will be chosen to participate in a reciprocal two-week professional exchange program in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Georgia, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, or Ukraine.

Prior to traveling abroad, winners will participate in a workshop hosted by a U.S. university, where they will meet with international teachers. Overseas, participants will work on joint teacher-training projects; visit local schools, parent committees, and nongovernmental organizations; speak to local government officials; and meet with Ministry of Education representatives.

The program is fully funded and provides visa support, round-trip domestic airfare, lodging, and meals to attend the U.S. conference, as well as round-trip airfare to the assigned country, vaccinations, lodging, and a daily stipend in the host country. You must be a U.S. citizen and available for travel April 5–18, 2008. The application deadline is **April 2, 2007**. For more information, visit **www.irex.org/programs/tea/index.asp**.

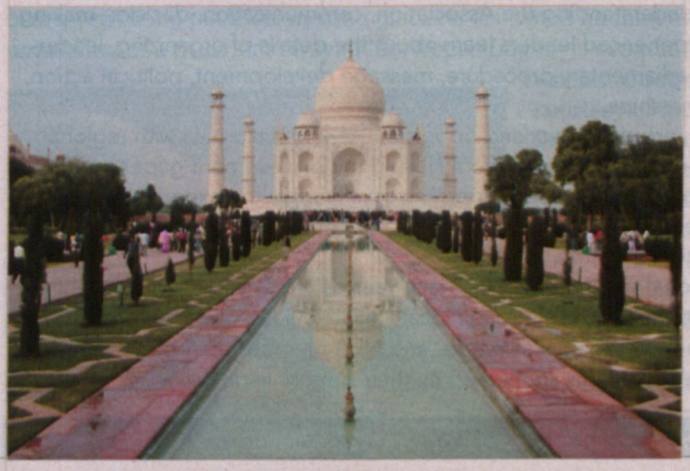

PHOTO: SUPREET VAID

REWARDING TOMORROW'S LEADERS TODAY

The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes honors outstanding young leaders who have made a significant difference to people and the planet.

Founded by author T.A. Barron and named for his mother, the Barron Prize annually selects 10 winners nationwide, half of whom focus on helping their communities and fellow humans, and half of whom focus on protecting the health and sustainability of the environment.

Students no younger than 8 and no older than 18 at the time of the nomination deadline are eligible. Nominees must be legal residents of the United States or Canada, and must have participated in the work for which they are being nominated within 12 months prior to the nomination deadline. Nominations are submitted by adults with solid knowledge of the nominee's work, but who are not related. This could include teachers, librarians, civic leaders, etc.

Winners each receive $2,000 to be applied to their higher education or their service project. The deadline to apply is **April 30, 2007**. Visit **www.barronprize.org** to download a nomination packet and read about winning projects.

PRESIDENTIAL AWARD HONORS EXEMPLARY SCIENCE, MATH TEACHERS

Help recognize the best 7th- to 12th-grade math and science teachers in your community by nominating them for the 2007 Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. Each year, the White House recognizes up to 108 outstanding teachers from all 50 states, as well as

Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, Department of Defense Schools, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Candidates must be nominated, either by themselves or someone else—principals, teachers, students, parents, or the general public.

Winners receive a citation signed by the President of the United States; a paid trip for two to Washington, D.C., to attend a weeklong series of events and professional development opportunities; gifts from program sponsors; and a $10,000 award from the National Science Foundation.

To find out about eligibility requirements, as well as download a nomination form and packet, visit **www.paemst.org**. Applications are due by **May 1, 2007**.

JOIN THE ALL-USA TEACHER TEAM

USA Today seeks up to 20 nominees, both individual teachers and instructional teams, to become members of the All-USA Teachers Team. Judges consider how well each teacher defines student needs, what methods the teacher has developed or uses to meet those needs, how well the teacher executes those methods, and the impact the teacher has on students, the school, and the community.

Winners are announced in October, and their photographs are published and accomplishments noted in *USA Today*. Each member also receives a trophy, plus $2,500—$500 for the teacher(s) and the remainder to the school for use as designated by the teacher(s). Certified, full-time K–12 teachers for the 2006–07 school year are eligible.

The deadline is **April 30, 2007**. Go to **www.usatoday.com/news/education/allstars/front.htm?Loc=vanity**.

ESSAY CONTEST FOR CAREER AND TECHNICAL ED STUDENTS

The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) is sponsoring an essay contest in memory of former ACTE Senior Director of Communications Cliff Weiss (1951–2004). Students are asked to respond to the question, "How will what you learned in career and technical education help the American economy in five years?"

The essay should be no more than 500 words. The winning student will receive $250, and his or her essay will be published in ACTE's *Techniques Magazine*. To be eligible, students must be enrolled in at least one career and technical course. The deadline is **March 30, 2007**. For more, visit **www.acteonline.org/about/awards/CWMEC/index.cfm**.

Minority Leadership Training Seminars

NEA President Reg Weaver is an alum. So are a growing number of state affiliate presidents. And so, quite possibly, is one of your co-workers.

Each year, NEA's Minority Leadership Training Seminars help between 1,500 and 2,000 members learn more about the inner workings of the Association and prepare for leadership roles in their schools, communities, and their local, state, and national Associations.

Created in the wake of the 1966 merger between NEA and the American Teachers Association, the program continues to fulfill its goal of increasing the involvement of minorities in NEA activities at all levels, thereby helping "move the agenda of the Association," says Genevieve Phelps of NEA Human and Civil Rights, which manages the program.

Leadership development sessions are geared toward both members just beginning to participate in Association work and experienced leaders who have been elected or appointed to state or local leadership positions. Emerging leaders attend sessions on developing a vision, understanding the Association, communication, decision-making and assertiveness. Experienced leaders learn about the details of organizing, leadership and language, parliamentary procedure, message development, political action, and developing partnerships.

The sessions also include networking opportunities and dialogues with regional and national experts on issues ranging from closing the achievement gaps to community and parental involvement. Just as important, says Phelps, the experience gives emerging leaders their share of "union moments"—experiences where they "saw the impact of the union on education," she says.

A half-dozen regional seminars are held each year, as are smaller training programs customized to meet the needs of state and local affiliates. State presidents each select six members to attend the regional seminars, and NEA members can also attend individually or through programs sponsored by their state or local Association.

For more details and registration forms, visit www.nea.org/ref?3262

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Take Note

Earth Day: The Play's the Thing

If you're looking for an interesting approach to Earth Day this year (April 22), consider staging a dramatic student performance.

"Walden: The Ballad of Thoreau," a theatrical play by folksinger, songwriter, concert performer, and now playwright Michael Johnathon, is offered for download to high school teachers free of charge. The two-act, one-set play for four characters focuses on the last two days that Henry David Thoreau—American author, naturalist, philosopher, abolitionist, former teacher, and early proponent of civil disobedience—spent in his cabin at Walden Pond, Massachusetts. Much of the script dialogue comprises actual or composite quotes from Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

To download the play as well as a teacher's guide, you need to obtain a password by sending an e-mail to producer@waldenplay.com. You can also send a fax on school stationery to (859) 225-4020. Either way, include your name, the grade you teach, school name, school address, and phone number in your e-mail or fax request. Visit the Web site at www.waldenplay.com for more information.

They Can Be Great Because They Can Serve

There's still time to help students plan their service project for National & Global Youth Service Day. The largest annual youth service event in the world occurs April 20–22, 2007. Resources are available online to help you plan:

THE PLANNING TOOLKIT is a comprehensive guide to help project planners identify their projects, recruit volunteers, generate media attention, raise funds, and more.

THE SERVICE LEARNING CURRICULUM GUIDE contains eight lessons to develop students' project management skills.

CLASSROOM POSTERS are colorful tools to recruit volunteers and decorate project sites. The back contains a guide for teachers and activity sheets for students.

For more information, visit www.ysa.org/nysd/resource/planning.cfm.

Explore the Far North, While It's Still Frozen

In February, polar explorer and conservationist Will Steger began a 1,200-mile, four-month-long dogsled expedition across the Canadian Arctic's Baffin Island. Traveling with Inuit dog teams over traditional hunting paths, up frozen rivers, through steep-sided fjords, over glaciers and ice caps, and across the sea ice, Steger and his team are visiting some of the most remote Inuit villages of the world, listening to and documenting the Inuit's experience with climate change. These collected stories illustrate dramatic climate-related changes happening in the Arctic—starving polar bears, retreating pack ice, melting glaciers, disrupted hunting and traveling, and the unraveling of a traditional way of life. Depending on ice conditions, the expedition will last through May or June, and courtesy of technology and the Internet, you and your students can follow along and discover the implications of global warming.

At the Web site you can view team updates, including video, images, sounds, and text; download lesson plans, discussion starters, and activity guides for middle and high school; and participate in a moderated online forum. For more, go to www.globalwarming101.com.

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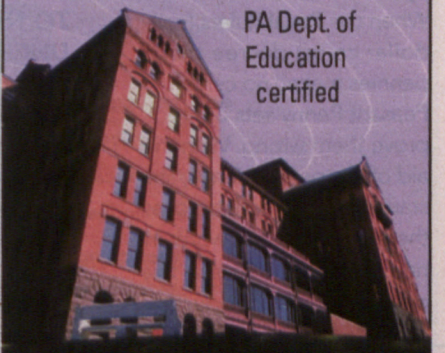

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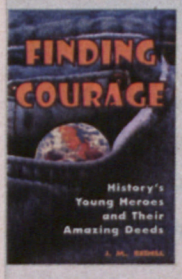
'IMPOSSIBLE' WAS NOT IN HER VOCABULARY

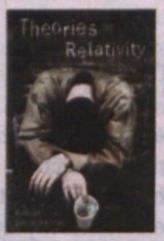
Inspired by a true story, ***I Could Do That: Esther Morris Gets Women the Vote*** by Linda Arms White introduces a spunky little girl who grew up to be one very determined woman. In addition to her appointment as the first female judge in the United States and the first woman to hold a political office, Esther—an ardent abolitionist—was instrumental in gaining women's suffrage in the Wyoming Territory. Grades 2–4. 31 pp. $16 from Farrar Straus Giroux. To order, go to www.fsgkidsbooks.com.

HEROES FROM AN EARLY AGE



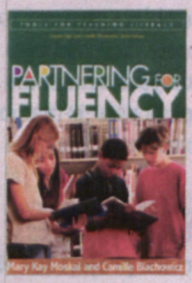
From a girl in China who disguised herself as a warrior to defend her people to a young American abolitionist on the Underground Railroad, ***Finding Courage: History's Young Heroes and Their Amazing Deeds*** by J.M. Bedell tells 27 stories of young people who made a positive difference. For young adults. 144 pp. $9.95 from Beyond Words Publishing. To order, go to www.beyondword.com.

NOWHERE TO GO, NOWHERE TO RUN



Dylan Wallace's theory is that "all relatives suck," and he should know. His unstable mother has turned him out into the streets to make room for a new boyfriend, and when he finally meets the father he never knew, he's sorry that he does. Sixteen years old and faced with a situation that defeats experienced adults, Dylan will stay alive—or not—on wits and a fierce determination to survive, but bitterness may consume him. ***Theories of Relativity*** by Barbara Haworth-Attard is a bleak and gritty look at the desperation of teen homelessness. For young adults. 240 pp. $16.95 from Henry Holt and Company. Go to www.henryholtchildrensbooks.com to order.

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING FLUENCY



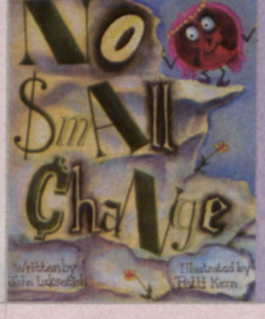
Fluency in reading makes all the difference between children who read easily and enjoy it and children who view it as an onerous task. ***Partnering for Fluency*** by Mary Kay Moskal and Camille Blachowicz provides concrete strategies to integrate fluency into the literacy curriculum. In addition to guidance in judging the difficulty of texts and assessing fluency in students, the authors offer suggestions for recruiting parents and volunteers as fluency partners. 142 pp. $19.95 from The Guilford Press. Go to www.guilford.com.

BOOKS BY NEA MEMBERS

NO SMALL CHANGE

By John Luksetich

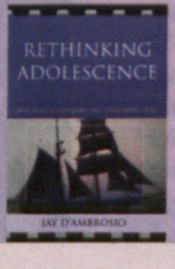
When the Royal Rulers (half-dollar coins) decree that pennies make "no cents," Peasant Penny sets out to prove them wrong. With the aid of her penny friends, she starts a rebellion that proves there are cents and worth in numbers. This whimsical tale offers a colorful introduction to math and the importance of proving your worth. Ages 4–8. 32 pp. $14.95 from Imagine Nation Press. Go to www.imaginenationpress.com.



RETHINKING ADOLESCENCE: USING STORY TO NAVIGATE LIFE'S UNCHARTED YEARS

By Jay D'Ambrosio

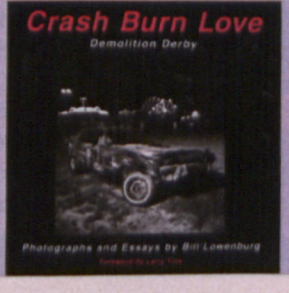
This book offers approaches for understanding adolescents on an emotional level through the use of myths and stories. The author maintains that stories speak to us, can help adults comprehend common challenges in adolescence, and are useful as educational and healing tools. Includes discussion topics to use with students and recommendations of movies and stories. 166 pp. $27.95. from Rowman & Littlefield. Go to www.rowmaneducation.com.



CRASH BURN LOVE: DEMOLITION DERBY

By Bill Lowenburg

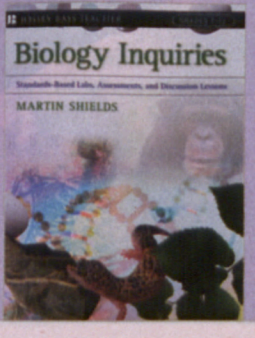
For an inside look at the sport of demolition derbys, page through this collection of photographs taken by a librarian and former history teacher. Beginning with a thoughtful introduction, it continues with compelling black and white photos of the human and mechanical elements that make up this fascinating subculture. 108 pp. $44.95 from BackStreet-Books. To order, go to www.backstreetbooks.com.



BIOLOGY INQUIRIES: STANDARDS-BASED LABS, ASSESSMENTS, AND DISCUSSION LESSONS

By Martin Shields

This resource helps middle and high school teachers introduce standards-based inquiry and constructivist lessons into their classrooms. Entries range from inquiry labs to assessments, each student-centered and focused on active learning. Reproducibles are included. 282 pp. $32.95 from Jossey-Bass. Go to www.josseybass.com.



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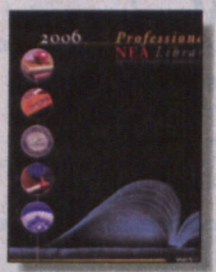

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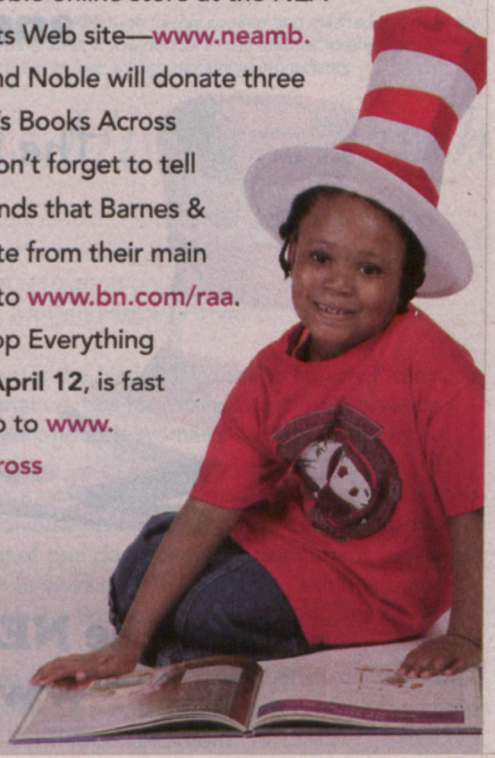
Thanks to a new partnership with Barnes & Noble.com, celebrating NEA's Read Across America will mean more books for school libraries in need.

Through **March 10**, for every book purchased from the Barnes & Noble online store at the NEA Member Benefits Web site—**www.neamb.com**—Barnes and Noble will donate three percent to NEA's Books Across America. And don't forget to tell parents and friends that Barnes & Noble will donate from their main site as well. Go to **www.bn.com/raa**.

Reminder: Drop Everything and Read Day, **April 12**, is fast approaching. Go to **www.nea.org/readacross** for more on this exciting event.



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The Foundation and the National Education Association believe that pre-K through 12 curriculum should be taught by licensed teachers. We recognize that in certain urban, suburban, and rural communities not every teacher is licensed. In an effort to help teachers become fully licensed, the Foundation and NEA agreed to join forces to assist teachers who desire to gain full licensure. The unprecedented program is designed to increase the number of fully-certified minority teachers around the country to strengthen America's teaching force.

During the 2005-2006 school year, the Foundation provided financial assistance and NEA provided technical assistance and expertise to nearly 300 teachers in seven states supporting their participation in coursework and workshops. The program also paid for materials and individual tutoring to help teachers prepare for state licensure examinations.

Today, the partnership is looking to increase the number of participating Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and expand the program to help more teachers obtain full licensure.

Stay tuned for updated information via the *NEA Today* and the NEA website www.nea.org.

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DIVERSITY CALENDAR

MARCH

MARCH—IRISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH
Erin go bragh! A time to honor the heritage and many contributions of citizens of Irish descent.

MARCH—MUSIC IN OUR SCHOOLS MONTH
This year's theme is "Music Touches Lives." Visit www.menc.org/guides/miosm/MIOSMFront.html.

MARCH 1—KOREAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT DAY
On this day in 1919, the Korean people joined in peaceful demonstrations against Japanese colonial rule. Korea finally gained independence in 1945.

MARCH 3—ADOPTION OF NATIONAL ANTHEM
Written by Francis Scott Key in 1814, "The Star Spangled Banner" was made our national anthem in 1931.

MARCH 11—JOHNNY APPLESEED DAY
John Chapman, a traveling nurseryman and early conservationist, planted hundreds of apple orchards in the midwest before his death in 1845.

APRIL

APRIL—KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL MONTH
An annual observance highlighting efforts to improve our environment through education and beautification. Visit www.kab.org for information.

APRIL—NATIONAL DONATE LIFE MONTH
Each day, about 77 people receive an organ transplant, but 19 others die waiting for a donated organ. Find out more at www.organdonor.gov.

APRIL 2—INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S BOOK DAY
This event is celebrated on Hans Christian Andersen's birthday. Each year, a section of the International Board on Books for Young People sponsors the day, and this year it's New Zealand's turn. For more, visit www.usbby.org or www.ibby.org.

APRIL 15—HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY
On this day we remember the 6 million Jews who perished under Nazi rule. Find extensive resources at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum at www.ushmm.org/.

Diversity Recipe

IRISH POTATO FARLS

A potato bread that cooks up quickly in a griddle or frying pan, farls are considered an essential part of a traditional Ulster breakfast, along with bacon, eggs, sausage, and soda bread.

Ingredients
3–4 large potatoes, peeled and halved
1 cup flour
2 Tbsp butter
1/2 tsp salt (or more, to taste)
4 tsp vegetable oil, divided

Cover potatoes with water in a large saucepan and bring to a boil. Lower heat and simmer until tender, 20–30 minutes; drain and mash. Melt butter and add to potatoes along with the salt. Stir in flour and mix until absorbed. Gather into a ball and turn out onto a floured surface. Knead lightly. Divide mixture in two and roll out each half into an 8-inch circle—about 1/4 inch thick. Cut each circle into quarters. Cook about 3 minutes on each side in 2 tsp of vegetable oil, using a griddle or heavy frying pan. Use remaining vegetable oil if needed. Serve with butter or margarine. Makes 8 farls.

Cook's note: Although freshly cooked and mashed potatoes are recommended, if you decide to use leftover mashed potatoes, heat them before adding remaining ingredients.

Ella Flagg Young, first female superintendent of a large public school system (Chicago), and first female president of NEA, elected in 1910.

March—Women's History Month

The National Women's History Project was founded in 1980. Within a few years it had spawned National Women's History Week, celebrated by thousands of schools and communities. In 1987, Congress expanded the celebration to the month of March. This year's theme is ***Generations of Women Moving History Forward.***

The grandmother of Web sites for this event is the National Women's History Project (NWHP) at **www.nwhp.org**. You'll find information, tips for promoting the observance, a calendar of historical events featuring women, notable women's birthdays, and more.

The National Women's History Museum is a nonpartisan, nonprofit educational institution dedicated to celebrating the rich and diverse history of women's contributions to American culture and society. With the goal of one day opening a permanent facility in Washington, D.C., the online cybermuseum at **www.nwhm.org/** hosts exhibits that trace the history of women's suffrage through the Progressive Era.

Thomson Gale features women's biographies at **www.gale.com/womenshistory**. As well as standard entries, the site examines less well-known notables, including Maya Lin, Leslie Marmon Silko, Antonia Hernández, Dorothy Dandridge, and more.

PHOTO LOWER LEFT: NEA ARCHIVES

On the Web

BELIEVE IN THEIR RIGHT TO COLLEGE

It's tough to set one's sights on higher education if others in the family have not traveled the path. If you work with students who are the first in their family to go to college, steer them to a new Web site that provides support and guidance to help navigate the barriers of money, prejudice, isolation, and inadequate preparation. The site includes facts about college access, motivational quotes and books, tips, grade-by-grade planning checklists, and more. Also featured are videos presenting interviews with first-timers; comparisons of college preparation in urban and suburban schools; and a profile of recently arrived immigrant students and obstacles they must overcome. The site is supported by What Kids Can Do and the Lumina Foundation for Education. For more information, go to **www.firstinthefamily.org**.

Bonus: Read the first chapter ("You are College Material") from *First in the Family: Advice About College from First-Generation Students* at **www.whatkidscando.org/featurestories/firstinthefamily2.html**.

THE GRANDDADDY OF 'FREE STUFF' WEB SITES

The U.S. Department of Education announces their newly updated Federal Resources for Education Excellence (FREE) Web site. There are over 1,500 free resources for teachers and students, ranging from primary historical documents, lesson plans, science visualizations, math simulations and challenges, paintings, photos, mapping tools, and more, provided by the Library of Congress, National Archives, the National Endowment for the Humanities, National Gallery of Art, National Park Service, Smithsonian, NSF, NASA, and others. Go to **www.free.ed.gov**.

WHAT'S IN YOUR BACKYARD?

Funded by Annenberg Media, the Journey North Web site engages students in a study of wildlife migration and seasonal change. K–12 students share their own field observations with classmates across North America and in doing so, track the coming of spring through the migration patterns of monarch butterflies, bald eagles, robins, hummingbirds, whooping cranes, and other birds and mammals; the budding of plants; changing sunlight; and other natural events. Find standards-based lesson plans, activities, and information to help students make local observations and fit them into a global context. Go to **www.learner.org/jnorth**.

On TV

GREAT PERFORMANCES AT THE MET: THE FIRST EMPEROR

PBS, March. Check local listings for dates/times.
Enjoy the PBS premiere of composer Tan Dun's (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*) epic opera based on the life and reign of Qin Shi Huangdi, the first man to unify the warring states of ancient China and the builder of the first Great Wall. This monumental production features legendary tenor Plácido Domingo as Emperor Qin, and music that is a mix of East and West. Watch for the launch of a companion Web site later this month.

MOTHERS OF INVENTION

History Channel, March 9, 6 a.m. ET/PT.
From windshield wipers to refrigerator train cars, learn about "Lady Edisons"—women inventors—and their many brain-children. You'll also discover how changes in patent laws were linked to the evolving role of women in Western society, eventually enabling them to obtain patents, legal protection, and growing financial independence.

BIOGRAPHY—SUSAN B. ANTHONY: REBEL FOR THE CAUSE

A&E, March 12, 4 a.m. ET/PT.
Meet this indomitable early feminist who crusaded for equal pay for equal work and women's suffrage—a leader in America's first civil rights movement. Tape and use in the classroom for two years. Teaching materials are available at www.aetv.com/class.

GALÁPAGOS

National Geographic, March 18, 8 p.m. ET/PT.
Don't miss this compelling look at the islands of the Galápagos. Hour one focuses on wildlife, from giant tortoises and sea lions to the world's most fascinating reptile—the marine iguana; hour two looks at Darwin and his legacy; hour three considers how to keep this "evolution laboratory" pristine for future generations.

MARK TWAIN'S ROUGHING IT

Hallmark, March 26 and April 2, 3 a.m. ET/PT.
This two-part adaptation of Mark Twain's semi-autobiographical novel charts events from his life, including his youthful travels in the West, striking it rich and losing it all, and his commencement speech at his daughter's college graduation. Can be taped and used in the classroom for one year.

On TV listings are provided by KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, D.C., www.kidsnet.org, and Cable in the Classroom Magazine *at www.ciconline.org.*

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Crying Over a Test

How the state exam is hurting my children.

BY DAVID KEYES

Soon it will be test day. My second-graders will clear off their desks, sharpen their No. 2 pencils, and sit down to take their annual standardized exams. This is supposed to help schools close the achievement gap, but it has many unintended consequences.

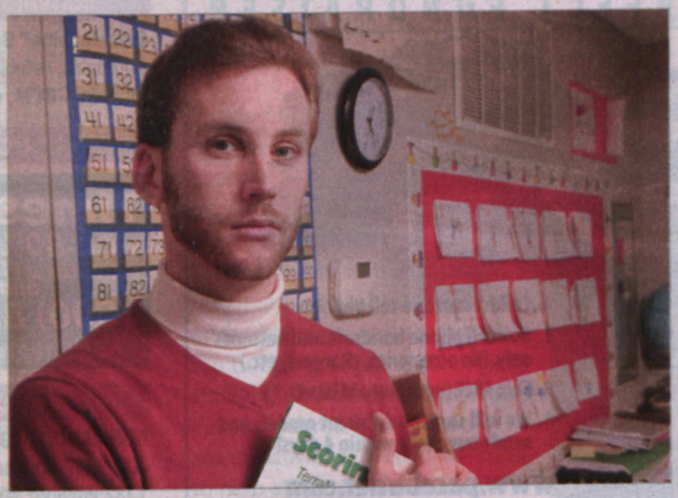
The tests will take two-and-a-half hours, though that is not the only time devoted to them. We have a rigorous test prep program that starts in October.

At first, my students were excited when I passed out their shiny test prep books, but it wasn't long before excitement was replaced by groans. The work was boring—three-sentence passages reminiscent of Dick and Jane. I struggled to keep my own groans inaudible.

Also, the test prep program completely changed the classroom culture I worked so hard to establish. I put a lot of effort into convincing my students it is OK to make mistakes. I use open-ended tasks so they can work at their own level. In writing, I might expect a well-edited paragraph from one student, two simple sentences from another. The test prep program sends a very different message: Each question has one correct answer, which all students must find. My students quickly forgot my mantra that mistakes were OK. The X's next to their wrong answers speak louder than my words.

OUT OF THE BLUE, she added, "I'm in second grade and I'm about to take the tests."

Test prep has also hurt my efforts to get students to work together. In one assignment, I put students in groups to read about the lives of famous African-Americans. On the way to lunch, they excitedly bombarded me with facts about Harriet Tubman, Jackie Robinson, and Martin Luther King Jr.



This excitement vanishes when we get out our test prep books. Perhaps it has to do with the file folders students must put between themselves so they don't copy each other's work. The engagement I see when they work together is replaced by animosity as they guard their answers.

Students who get correct answers clench their fists and exclaim, "Yes!" while those who make mistakes yell, "Stop bragging!" I try my best to stop this behavior, reminding students that bragging hurts people's feelings, but my efforts are futile.

Recently, two struggling students who had failed to get a single answer right all week broke down in tears.

Last week, I was the one crying—not over a test, but a biography of Hank Aaron I was reading to them. His story of growing up in poverty and overcoming racism to become a baseball star touched me deeply. When I said, "This book is making me cry," my students at first didn't believe me. But then they looked closely at my eyes. "He *is* crying," they whispered to each other.

They became as engrossed as I was. Some asked me to read the hateful letters fans sent to Aaron again, which prompted an engaged discussion on racism. All cheered when I read about his mother coming onto the field after he broke Babe Ruth's home run record.

Afterward, I planned to have them write pretend letters to Hank Aaron. But one asked if he was still alive.

"Yes," I said.

"Can we actually send the letters to him?" she asked.

What a great idea! I felt fantastic as I walked around watching them compose their letters. They talked excitedly with each other about what they wanted to say. Students who normally struggled to put two sentences down on paper were going onto the back of the page. It was the pinnacle of my year.

One student wrote, "I liked when you got hate letters and you still ignored them."

Another said, "I think you were brave because when you got death threats you still tried to beat a White man's record."

A third student began similarly. Then, out of the blue, she added, "I'm in second grade and I'm about to take the tests. I am nervous."

How had this thought gotten into her letter? It was completely unrelated to everything else she had written. Was her test anxiety so deep that it came out at random?

I'm anxious, too. I have nightmares that when my students sit down for their tests, it will all be too much—the months of dogged work, the file folders separating them, the desperate search for the right bubble to fill in—and the entire class will erupt in tears. If that happens, I'll probably join them.

David Keyes teaches second grade in Bel Pre Elementary School in Silver Spring, Maryland.

PHOTO: CHARLES VOTAW

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